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(10) Robert G. Weinland

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SUPERPOWER NAVAL DIPLOMACY IN THE OCTOBER 1973
ARAB-ISRAELI WAR

Robert G. Weinland

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This paper was written in 1976, while the author was a member of the defense analysis staff of the Brookings Institution. The opinions it expresses are solely those of its author.

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SUPERPOWER NAVAL DIPLOMACY IN THE OCTOBER 1973
ARAB-ISRAELI WAR

027 I. INTRODUCTION

028 Examination of U.S. and Soviet military involvement in the
029 October 1973 Arab-Israeli War can serve several useful purposes.
030 It can provide insights into superpower policies and practices with
031 regard to local conflicts in the Middle East -- the conditions under
032 which they have elected to become involved, their objectives and
033 some specifics of their modus operandi in such involvement, and the
034 limits beyond which they appear to be unwilling (or unable) to take
035 their involvement. These insights can serve as a guide to what might
036 occur should the same situation arise in the future.* Integrated with
037 other information, these insights can also help to explain super-
038 power policies and practices in other areas and situations.** Such
039 an examination also serves a more narrow purpose. It provides in-
040 sights into the influence each superpower's actions can have on the
041 behavior of the other. The practical implications of this should
042 require no elaboration.

045
046

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047 This is not a contention that history repeats itself. It is merely
048 a reflection of the difficulty of believing there will not be a
049 fifth Arab-Israeli War. If there is such a war, it is difficult to
050 believe that either the United States or the Soviet Union can avoid
051 involvement in it. And if they do become involved, it is difficult
052 to see their involvement differing substantially from the patterns
053 set during the October War.

054 **

055 For instance, knowledge of the nature and extent of Soviet involve-
056 ment in the preparation of the October War is obviously relevant not
057 only to predicting the renewal of conflict in the Middle East, but
058 also to forecasting the long-run prospects for stability in U.S. -
059 Soviet detente.

060 Obviously a brief discussion such as this cannot address all
061 of those questions. Its objectives are necessarily more modest. It
062 attempts three things. The first is to provide a summary descrip-
063 tion of U.S. and Soviet naval operations related to the October 1973
064 Arab-Israeli War. Neither participated directly in the conflict; but
065 both were actively involved in supporting the belligerents and relied
066 heavily on their naval forces in providing that support.

067 The two superpowers were also intent upon influencing each
068 other's actions -- each attempting to limit the other's involvement
069 in the conflict. They exerted that influence through political sig-
070 nals, and again relied heavily on their naval forces to transmit and
071 reinforce those signals. The second objective of this discussion is
072 therefore to identify some of the signalling that went on between the
073 United States and the Soviet Union in the language of military -- in
074 this case largely Naval -- actions. That requires detailed examination
075 of movements and activities; they are the very stuff of nonverbal
076 communication, and reconstructing them in detail is the only way to
077 find out what was being said.

078 Third, much of what the Soviets did prior to and during the
079 initial period of the War is difficult to understand unless one
080 assumes they knew in advance what the Arabs planned to do, and
081 when. However, since that factor is critical to determining what
082 larger implications about Soviet behavior should be drawn from this
083 experience, it cannot be left as an assumption. Consequently, the

084 question of Soviet foreknowledge is examined as directly as possible.

085 For a variety of reasons, neither the course of events in the
085 War itself, nor the diplomatic exchanges surrounding it, figure
086 prominently in this discussion. Nevertheless, since they provided
087 the context for the superpower actions that are the focus of this
087 discussion, skeletal summaries of both are included.

088 II. PREPARATION OF THE ARAB OFFENSIVE*

088 Immediately after their defeat in the June War of 1967, the
089 Arabs -- with Egypt in the lead and assisted by the Soviet Union --
089 began to prepare for another round in their still unfinished conflict
090 with Israel. Those preparations advanced through three more-or-less
090 sequential stages: rebuilding Arab military capabilities, negating
091 the Israeli offensive advantage, and making ready for the attack.
091 The first objective was largely realized by the initiation of the

092

093 *

093 Many accounts of the background to the October War have appeared --
094 some from participants, others from observers located at varying
095 distances from the critical events. All of these accounts are after
096 the fact. Despite widespread overlap, there are many areas of dis-
097 agreement. This very brief recapitulation incorporates elements
098 from several of these accounts. The process of selecting elements
099 for inclusion was subjective, and governed by three criteria:

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- the inherent credibility of each element.
- its compatibility with other credible elements, and
- the coherence of the account produced by their inte-
gration.

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106

The outcome is not necessarily the truth; but, given the "fit" that
emerges in elements drawn from widely divergent sources, it probably
is not far from the truth.

107 "War of Attrition" in late 1968-early 1969, the second at its con-
108 conclusion in August 1970. The beginning of the third phase can be
109 traced back to 1971 -- President Sadat's "Year of Decision" -- when
110 active preparations were undertaken for an offensive which it was
111 hoped would lead to reconquest of the occupied territories. Those
112 plans suffered a series of setbacks in the two and a half years
113 that elapsed before the attack was finally launched.*¹

114 The departure of Soviet forces from Egypt in July 1972 set the
115 stage for the October 1973 offensive -- increasing Sadat's freedom
116 of action and also his bargaining power with the Soviets.² In the
117 Fall of 1972, the Egyptians scaled down both their objectives and
118 their weapons requirements for the offensive. The Soviets, who had
119 been skeptical of earlier Egyptian plans and unwilling to provide
120 all of the armaments they wanted, eventually agreed to supply these
121 reduced requirements.³

122 Operational planning for the attack reportedly began in Decem-
123 ber 1972.⁴ Three optimal attack "windows" in 1973 were identified:
124 the second half of May, 7-11 September and 5-10 October.⁵ In January
125 1973 a Joint Staff was established under Egyptian command to coordinate

126
127 *
128 The planned attack that lay behind President Sadat's proclamation of
129 1971 as the "Year of Decision" did not materialize. Ostensibly, this
130 was due to the outbreak of the Indo-Pakistani War; however, its post-
131 ponement also may have been a reflection of Soviet failure to provide
132 the kind of support the Egyptians considered essential. The attack
133 was apparently reset for early 1972, and then postponed again in
134 anticipation of the May U.S.-Soviet summit meeting.

135 preparations with Syria, and the active cooperation of the other
136 Arab states was solicited. By February, the attack had been
137 scheduled for May.⁶ By March, other Arab states were moving to
138 provide assistance, and the Soviets were actively supporting Arab
139 preparations -- the Soviet transport of Moroccan forces to Syria
140 is an example of both.*

141 By April, the Arabs were apparently ready to go, but -- for
142 reasons that remain obscure** -- the attack was postponed to one
143 of the later "windows."⁷ At the end of August, a date within the
144 October "window" was chosen.⁸ The precise timing of the attack
145 reportedly was selected in early October.⁹ It was finally launched
146 as scheduled at 1400 local time on 6 October.

147

147 *

147 See pp. 8, 9 below for a discussion of this and other such efforts.

148

148 **

148 The delay may have been at Soviet insistence -- perhaps because the
149 Arabs were not in fact as ready as they thought they were, or because
150 the Soviets themselves were not ready, or because the situation was
151 not appropriate (a major conflict between Palestinian forces and the
152 Lebanese Army erupted in Beirut in May). The large-scale Soviet air-
153 lift of additional air defense weaponry to Syria in April and the
154 Egyptian rehearsal exercises in June lend some credence to the first
155 of these interpretations. The delay might also have been a reflec-
156 tion of Syrian-Egyptian disagreement over the objectives of the
157 offensive or problems encountered in coordinating their operational
158 plans.

159 III. SOVIET FOREKNOWLEDGE

160 Familiarity with Soviet activity prior to the war helps explain
161 some of the actions they took immediately after it began. * There are
162 two important questions to be addressed in this regard. The first
163 concerns the nature and extent of Soviet foreknowledge: did they
164 know the attack was coming? And the second, which assumes they knew
165 (and that is a safe assumption), concerns the Soviet role in its pre-
166 paration: support, acquiescence, or opposition?

167 There is no doubt that the Soviets know that hostilities were
168 imminent.¹⁰ Presidents Sadat and Assad had informed them of the
169 attack in advance;¹¹ the Soviets themselves claim to have warned the
170 United States about it,¹² and in any event their actions in the
171 period immediately before conflict broke out provide unambiguous
172 confirmation that they knew it was coming: e.g., they began
173 evacuating their dependents from Egypt and Syria three days before-
174 hand.¹³ The only questions that remain unanswered are, how much
175 they knew, and how far in advance they knew it.

176 Circumstantial evidence suggests that the Soviets had signi-
177 ficant strategic warning: that, by mid-September at the very latest,
178 they knew the Arabs would attack and roughly when. Circumstantial
179 evidence also suggests that they had been no less well-informed about
180 the attacks planned for the earlier "windows."¹⁴ Further, it suggests
181 that they were not just bystanders but assisted in the preparation of
182 these attacks. Since this evidence is circumstantial, and much of
183 it is open to interpretation, it deserves discussion.

184 For purposes of examination, Soviet activities before the
185 October War can be divided into three logically distinct periods:
186 before the Arab decision to attack; between that decision and the
187 attack itself; and immediately prior to the attack. Prior to the
188 Arab decision to launch this offensive, the Soviets had consistently
189 followed two contradictory policies: they had armed the Arabs and
190 simultaneously attempted to restrict the Arabs' use of these arms.¹⁵
191 They did the latter most effectively with Egypt by refusing to pro-
192 vide, or providing only limited number of, those weapons the Egyptians
193 felt they needed to carry out a successful offensive: fighter-bombers,
194 high-performance medium bombers and long-range surface-to-surface
195 missiles. The Egyptians calculated that, in order to recover Sinai
196 from the Israelis by military means, they first would have to defeat
197 the Israeli Air Force. These were the weapons they thought they
198 must have to do that.¹⁶

199 When the Egyptians scaled down their attack objectives in the
200 Fall of 1972, to emphasize recovery of Sinai by political rather
201 than military means,* they also scaled down their requirements for
202 offensive weapons: all they needed to handle Israeli air capabilities
203 was a strategic deterrent and battlefield defenses.¹⁷ The Soviets
204 had already given them the defenses. They now agreed to provide a
205 deterrent: the SCUD-B battlefield support missile. This is a ballis-
206 tic missile with a range of approximately 185 miles -- sufficient to

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207 *

207 A move that, in retrospect, must be acknowledged as a stroke of
207 genius.

208 threaten some Israeli population centers from Egyptian-controlled
209 territory. The SCUD comes in two versions: one equipped with a
210 nuclear warhead; the other equipped with a conventional, high-explo-
211 sive warhead.¹⁸ Some 30 of the conventional version -- roughly one
212 brigade -- appear to have been deployed to Egypt before the war be-
213 gan,¹⁹ perhaps as early as April, but certainly by mid-September.²⁰
214 Although placed under Egyptian operational control they were manned
215 by Soviet crews.*²¹

216 Providing offensive weaponry to the Egyptians was only one of
217 a number of steps taken by the Soviets to assist the Arabs in pre-
218 paring their attack. One of the reasons why the attack proved so
219 successful politically was that it was not simply a joint Egyptian-
220 Syrian operation but an Arab offensive. The Soviets took an active
221 part in getting radical and conservative Arab states together to
222 mount the attack, staying together until it was launched, and support-
223 ing it afterwards. In at least two instances, this assistance was
224 rendered more or less in the open.

225 The first instance involved the movement in Soviet amphibious
226 lift ships of a Moroccan Expeditionary Force to Syria. Shortly after
227 the decision to attack had been taken, the principals solicited assis-
228 tance from the other Arab states. The Moroccans decided to send a
229 brigade-sized force to the Syrian front.²² They had no way to trans-
230 port this unit, however, and were unable to arrange for another Arab

231

231 *

231 Near the end of the War, several of these missiles apparently were
232 launched against Israeli forces located in the area of the Suez Canal
233 bridgehead. None, however, seems to have been aimed against Israel
234 itself.

235 power to transport it for them -- apparently as a result of wide-
236 spread fears that the Israelis would attempt to interdict such a
237 movement.*²³ The Soviets finally agreed to conduct the operation,
238 and in April loaded a contingent of Moroccans into two LSTs and con-
239 voyed them to Syria.²⁴ They moved a second Moroccan contingent in
240 similar fashion in July.²⁵ As it turned out, some mixture of prudence
241 and complacency prevailed in Israel and no attempt was made to stop
242 either of these movements; but the possibility that there might have
243 been such an attempt -- and Soviet acceptance of that risk -- were not
244 lost on the Arabs. And, while the movement of the Moroccans to Syria
245 cannot be considered an unambiguous tip-off of an impending attack,
246 its potential significance could not have been lost on the Soviets.

247 The second instance in which the Soviets provided active sup-
248 port to the Arab cause also occurred in April -- involving, in this
249 case, an effort to maintain the radical-conservative Arab unity that
250 the Moroccan troop lift operation was helping to create. The long-
251 standing territorial dispute between Iraq and Kuwait had once more
252 erupted in violence as Iraq seized Kuwaiti-controlled border areas.
253 The Soviets immediately sent both Admiral Gorshkov and a detachment

254

254 *
254 Those apprehensions were not altogether unreasonable. It had long
255 been clear that only concerted action by all of the Arabs could
256 defeat Israel. What unity had existed until then among the Arabs
257 had been largely confined to the more radical elements. Bringing
258 the conservative Moroccans to the largely radical-manned front lines
259 was a step toward a qualitatively new -- and for Israel far more
260 dangerous -- kind of unity.

261 of warships to Iraq. The exact purpose of these visits remains
262 obscure. Looking back, however, and noting that the first attack
263 "window" was then roughly a month away, it is not unreasonable to
264 infer that the Soviets were attempting to squelch a significant
265 threat to the unity required for the forthcoming offensive. For
266 whatever reason, as the Soviets arrived, the Iraqis relented.²⁶

267 In both instances, the Soviets evidenced a significant will-
268 ingness to take risks. In the first case, they were risking a mili-
269 tary confrontation with Israel; in both instances they were taking
270 a political risk that they had heretofore carefully avoided --
271 identification with an "offensive" action.* It is difficult to be-
272 lieve that they did either without a clear picture of the ends being
273 served by their actions.

274 After the war, in response to the charge that they had violated
275 both the spirit of detente and the terms of the 1972 U.S.-Soviet
276 "Agreement on Basic Principles of Relations" and the follow-on 1973
277 "Agreement on the Prevention of Nuclear War," the Soviets claimed
278 that they had in fact warned the United States of the impending con-
279 flict.**²⁷ Perhaps they did. If so, they showed themselves to be
280 singularly unsuccessful as communicators, which is unusual for them.

281

282 *

283 In other words, an action intended to alter rather than reinforce
284 the status quo.

285 **

286 Something they obviously could not have done without some degree of
287 foreknowledge.

288 In most instances, when the Soviets want to be understood, the recipient
289 gets the message. Perhaps in this case the "warning" they provided
290 was so obscure that it was recognizable only after the fact.

291 In any event, while the evidence clearly shows the offensive
292 to have been fundamentally an Arab undertaking, it also shows the
293 Soviets to have supported -- rather than merely acquiesced in -- the
294 attack. There is no reason to believe that they either pushed the
295 Arabs into attacking or were enthusiastic in their support for the
296 venture; the opposite appears to have been the case. On the other
297 hand, their lack of enthusiasm was limited. It was not translated
298 into effective opposition: the attack occurred.*

299 The Soviets were clearly ready for the attack when it came.
300 Some of their own preparations could have been undertaken with little
301 advance warning, but others required considerable lead time.

302 Soviet naval units began to leave Port Said the day before the
303 attack.** Since an action of that nature can be initiated in a matter
304 of hours, it doesn't reveal how much lead time the Soviets had -- only
305 that they did have some.

306
306 *
306 It is possible (but not very likely) that the Soviets had lost their
307 de facto veto power over major Arab military initiatives (a direct
308 attack on Israeli forces -- even if they were occupying Arab terri-
309 tory -- was no casual gesture). It is more likely that the situation
310 simply came to the point where the actual political costs of continued
311 Soviet opposition to Arab desires began to outweigh the potential mili-
312 tary costs of supporting the realization of those desires. It is also
313 possible (but again not very likely) that the Soviets perceived some
314 direct benefit for themselves that justified the risks involved.

315 **

315 See pp. 49, 50 below for details.

316 The evacuation of Soviet dependents from Egypt and Syria, which
317 began three days before the attack, could have been initiated on
318 relatively short notice. Given adequate contingency planning, it
319 need not have taken more than a day to move the first transport air-
320 craft to the Middle East and start assembling evacuees. No matter
321 how far in advance the Soviet learned about the attack, however, such
322 an evacuation necessarily would have been delayed until the last
323 minute, in order to minimize the opportunity for the Israelis to
324 recognize what was happening and respond.* Consequently while the
325 amount of lead time the Soviets undoubtedly had is increased, it
326 isn't by much.

327 It isn't clear how much lead time the Soviet require to modify
328 their normal program of reconnaissance satellite coverage. While it
329 is quite likely that there is enough slack in this program to insure
330 that extra boosters and payloads are available for use on short
331 notice, it is difficult to believe that a significant expansion in
332 coverage could be carried out without some planning and preparation.
333 It may be worth noting in this regard that, with one exception, in

334

334 *

334 Unless, of course, the Israelis were to be enticed into a politically
335 (and perhaps militarily) very costly preemptive strike. In any event,
336 it was common knowledge that the Israeli Defense Force required 72
337 hours to mobilize completely. Consequently, while it was obviously
338 to the Arabs' advantage to maintain secrecy as long as possible, once
339 that 72 hour point had been crossed the Israelis' ability to activate
340 their defenses began to diminish -- and with it the importance of the
341 Soviet evacuation as a tip-off

342 the year before the October War the Soviets launched only one or
343 two high-resolution photo-reconnaissance satellites per month. The
344 exception was May 1973, when they launched three. During October
345 1973, on the other hand, they launched five* -- three of which were
346 sent aloft during the first ten days of the war.²⁸

347 It is clear how long it takes, starting from "scratch," to
348 begin to reinforce the Mediterranean Squadron: a minimum of eight
349 days for surface combatants, which come from the Black Sea Fleet;**
350 the same for nuclear-powered submarines, which come from the Northern
351 Fleet; and about two and a half times that long for conventional sub-
352 marines, following the same route. A contingent of Soviet submarines
353 was entering the Mediterranean just as the War began.*** Assuming a
354 normal speed of advance -- and anything dramatically above the normal
355 would have been a "tipoff" that something important was about to
356 happen -- these units could have left the Northern Fleet no later than
357 mid-September. If, in fact, their entry into the Mediterranean was
358 meant to coincide with the attack, then the Soviets clearly had quite
359 a bit of warning: at least three weeks.

359

360 *

361 In addition to two low-resolution photo-reconnaissance satellites.

362 **

362 Assuming an "extra" declaration to exit the Black Sea via the Turkish
363 Straits is not available. If one is, and the timing is right, then
364 the first units can be in the Mediterranean within two days. If the
365 timing isn't right, it will take three days.

366 ***

366 See pp. 48-59 for a detailed discussion of Soviet naval movements
367 both before and during the war.

368 As noted below, the first unit of the new KARA-class cruiser
369 was in the Mediterranean until the day before the war began. If its
370 presence there was also intended to be a part of this preparatory
371 process, providing a diversionary focus for Western attention, then
372 it may be possible to specify precisely when the Soviets learned the
373 schedule for the attack. This unit deployed to the Mediterranean on
374 21 September. In order to do so, it would have been necessary for
375 its declaration to transit the Turkish Straits to be submitted on
376 the 13th. This was roughly when the submarines would have been getting
377 under way from their Northern Fleet bases, and mirabile dictu it was
378 the day after Presidents Sadat and Assad of Egypt and Syria concluded
379 a very significant coordination conference in Cairo by reestablishing
380 solid relations with King Hussein of Jordan -- a political sine qua non
381 for a resumption of conflict with Israel.²⁹

382 IV. MAJOR EVENTS

383 Figures 1 and 2 below summarize the major events in the October
384 War and the more significant U.S. and Soviet actions taken in connec-
385 tion with it. The events of the war itself have been described so
386 often and in such depth that their detailed reconstruction here is
387 unnecessary.³⁰ Further, many of the actions taken by the superpowers
388 during this period are not listed; most importantly, the diplomatic
389 maneuvering they undertook in the attempt to control the course of
390 events, and their efforts to reinforce their diplomatic positions
391 through the manipulation of their military postures -- e.g., the

FIGURE 1: MAJOR EVENTS IN THE CONFLICT*

	<u>Northern Front</u>	<u>Southern Front</u>
05 Oct		
06	Syrian attack initiated	Egyptian attack initiated
07		
08	Israeli counter-attack	Israeli counter-attack (repulsed)
09	Syrian advance contained	
10		
11	Israeli offensive/break-	
12	out into Syrian territory	
13	Israeli advance halted	
14	at Syrian defenses	Egyptian offensive (repulsed)
15		Egyptian advance contained
16		Israeli West Bank Force (WBF)
17		established
18		WBF reinforced
19		WBF offensive/breakout south
20		along canal
21		
22	Ceasefire I - continuation of conflict	
23		Egyptian III army cut-off in Sinai
24	Ceasefire II	
25		

* Data compiled from contemporary news reporting (Washington Post, New York Times, Times (London), Daily Telegraph (London)).

FIGURE 2: MAJOR SOVIET AND U.S.
ACTIONS REGARDING THE CONFLICT*

	<u>Soviet Union</u>	<u>United States</u>
05 Oct	Mediterranean Squadron (SOVMEDRON) movements initiated	
06		
07		Sixth Fleet movements initiated
08		
09		
10	Resupply airlift initiated	
11		
12		
13		Resupply airlift initiated
14		
15		
16	Kosygin visit to Egypt	
17	"	
18	"	
19	"	
20		Kissinger visit to Soviet Union
21	U.S.-Soviet agreement on ceasefire	
22		
23		
24	Airlift interrupted-SOVMEDRON repositioned	Alert--Sixth Fleet reinforcement and concentration
25	U.S.-Soviet agreement on UNEF	
26		
03 Nov	U.S.-Soviet Naval confrontation terminated	

* Data compiled from contemporary news reporting (Washington Post, New York Times, Times (London), Daily Telegraph (London)).

392 alerting of Soviet airborne forces, and the U.S. worldwide alert --
393 are slighted. Both these diplomatic actions and their military
394 adjuncts are discussed briefly below; but since very little reliable
395 information is available on either, this remains of necessity a
396 skeletal discussion.

397 As the conflict began, the United States and the Soviet Union
398 were pursuing diplomatic paths that diverged significantly. The
399 United States was pushing for an immediate ceasefire and return to
400 the boundaries that had prevailed since 1967. The Soviets were stall-
401 ing. Two weeks later, the situation had been reversed. The Soviets
402 were pushing (hard) for an immediate ceasefire in place; and the
403 United States -- although ostensibly in agreement with the Soviets
404 on the need for an immediate end to the hostilities -- was stalling
405 (or, more accurately, may have been stalling).

406 A number of parallels can be drawn between this reversal in
407 the diplomatic positions of the superpowers and the successive re-
408 versals that occurred in the military positions of the belligerents.
409 The first and most obvious is to be found in the nature and timing
410 of the two kinds of reversals. Within certain limits, the superpowers
411 adopted diplomatic postures that favored their clients' interests,
412 and modified these positions as the ebb and flow of combat affected
413 those interests. A second parallel can be found in the positions
414 that the superpowers adopted. Reflecting the limits of their own
415 situations, both superpowers steadfastly favored the cessation of

416 hostilities, differing only in the urgency they attached to the
417 achievement of a ceasefire and the character of the situation each
418 felt should prevail afterwards. The third parallel is a continuing
419 and pervasive lack of clarity regarding the actual course of both
420 diplomatic and military events. Who said (and did) what, to whom,
421 and when, remains obscure.³¹

422 Controversy -- both cause and effect of that lack of clarity --
423 still surrounds U.S. actions.³² The United States seems to have
424 made at least three major changes in its diplomatic position during
425 the conflict. In the beginning, it apparently favored -- and attempted
426 strenuously to arrange -- an immediate ceasefire and return to the
427 situation that had prevailed before the outbreak of hostilities.
428 Subsequently, (change 1) the United States abandoned its attempt to
429 restore the status quo ante. It then appears (change 2) to have re-
430 laxed its efforts to bring an end to the fighting. If it did, then
431 not long thereafter (change 3) it reversed course and intensified
432 those efforts dramatically. In the end, it took the lead in arrang-
433 ing the stand-still ceasefire that brought the war to its conclusion.

434 The first of these changes appears to have occurred very early
435 in the conflict -- after the failure of the initial Israeli counter-
436 attack in Sinai and before the Soviet resupply airlift was fully
437 underway.³³ It came about as the United States first realized that
438 restoration of the status quo ante was no longer a reasonable objective,
439 and then saw that the costs of preserving the overall Middle Eastern
440 balance were escalating. The second apparent change in the U.S.

441 position seems to have coincided with the establishment of the U.S.
442 resupply airlift³⁴ and to have persisted through the subsequent
443 Israeli crossing of the Suez Canal.³⁵ It was probably intended to
444 allow both of these developments to impact fully on the situation.
445 The third apparent change in the U.S. position was undoubtedly a re-
446 flection of the effectiveness of those actions. It occurred in response
447 to escalating Soviet concern over, and efforts to guarantee the safety
448 of, Egypt.

001 This was not the first time that the Soviets had evidenced such
002 a concern. It had happened in previous Middle East conflicts.³⁶ More
003 importantly, it had happened earlier in the October War itself.

004 Immediately after the outbreak of the War, and at least in their
005 dealings with the United States, the Soviets seem not to have attached
006 any great urgency to bringing the fighting to a halt.* In the end,

007

008 *

009 There is some evidence that, in their dealings with Egypt (and per-
010 haps with Syria as well), the Soviets took a significantly different
011 position -- attempting very early in the conflict to engineer a
012 ceasefire. Precisely what happened, and why, has not been adequately
013 clarified. It appears, though, that within hours of the initiation
014 of hostilities the Soviets approached the Egyptians and attempted
015 to pressure them into accepting a stand-still ceasefire -- ostensibly
016 at the behest of the Syrians. Part or all of this actually might
017 have occurred. There easily could have been an Egyptian-Syrian agree-
018 ment to end the conflict as soon as the limited military objectives
019 of both had been achieved, and the Egyptians easily could have con-
020 cluded from their early successes that those initial objectives were
021 far too limited -- that more was within their grasp, and that conse-
022 quently the fighting should be continued. If there was no such
023 agreement, and the Soviets did in fact make that approach to the
024 Egyptians, then they probably were attempting -- unsuccessfully as
025 it turned out -- to play off Egypt against Syria, to Soviet ad-
026 vantage.³⁷

027 however, they were so anxious to have a ceasefire that they were
028 moving -- or, at the very least, they took actions that made it
029 appear as though they were moving -- to intervene in the conflict
030 and bring it to a halt themselves. Although difficult to trace in
031 detail, the principal steps in their shift from one position to the
032 other can be identified, as can the linkages between this shift and
033 the successive military reversals suffered by Syria and Egypt.

034 The Soviets took the first visible steps away from their initial
035 position between roughly the 10th and the 13th of October, as the
036 Israeli counteroffensive on the Golan Heights gained momentum and the
037 Israelis began to talk and look as though they might move on Damascus* --
038 in spite of the clear signal given by the initiation of the Soviet
039 resupply airlift.³⁸ At that time the Soviets apparently threatened
040 Israel directly, and alerted or raised the degree of readiness of
041 some of their airborne divisions.³⁹ They did both again, of course,
042 between the 23rd and 25th, when the Israelis began to look as though they
043 might move on Cairo**⁴⁰ -- in spite of the signal that had been sent

044 _____
045 *
046 It is doubtful that the Israeli leadership seriously contemplated
047 such a move -- something the Soviets might have suspected, but
048 could not have known with certainty (and therefore a contingency for
049 which they had to prepare).

050 **
051 An Israeli move on Cairo, although militarily more feasible than an
052 advance on Damascus, was politically far less likely. Again, how-
053 ever, it was a contingency for which the Soviets had to prepare.

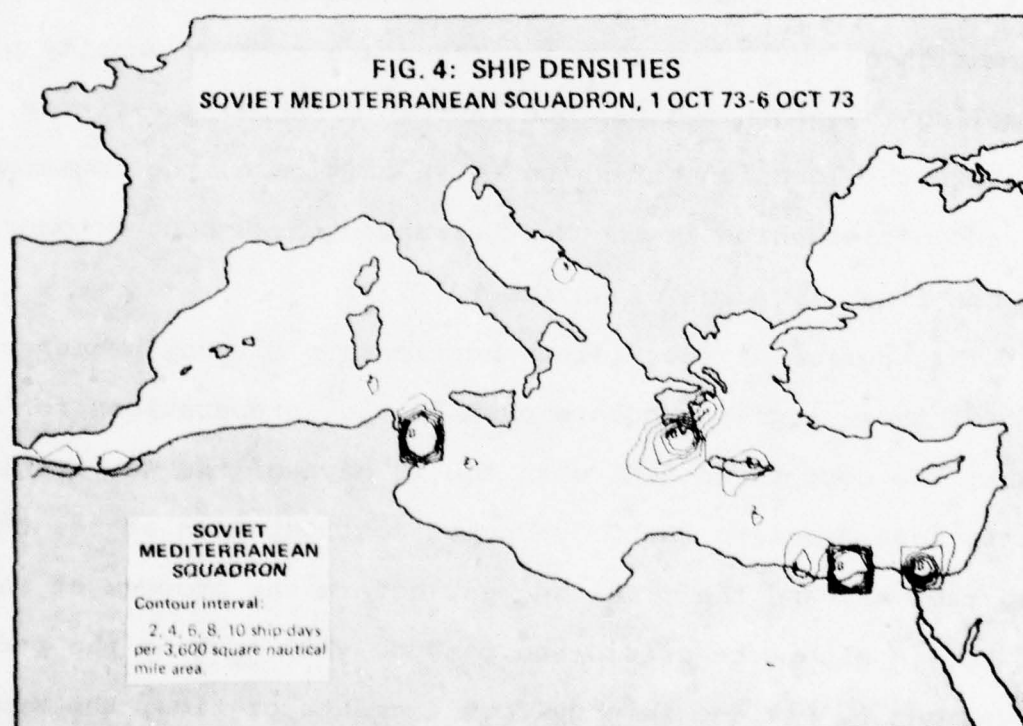
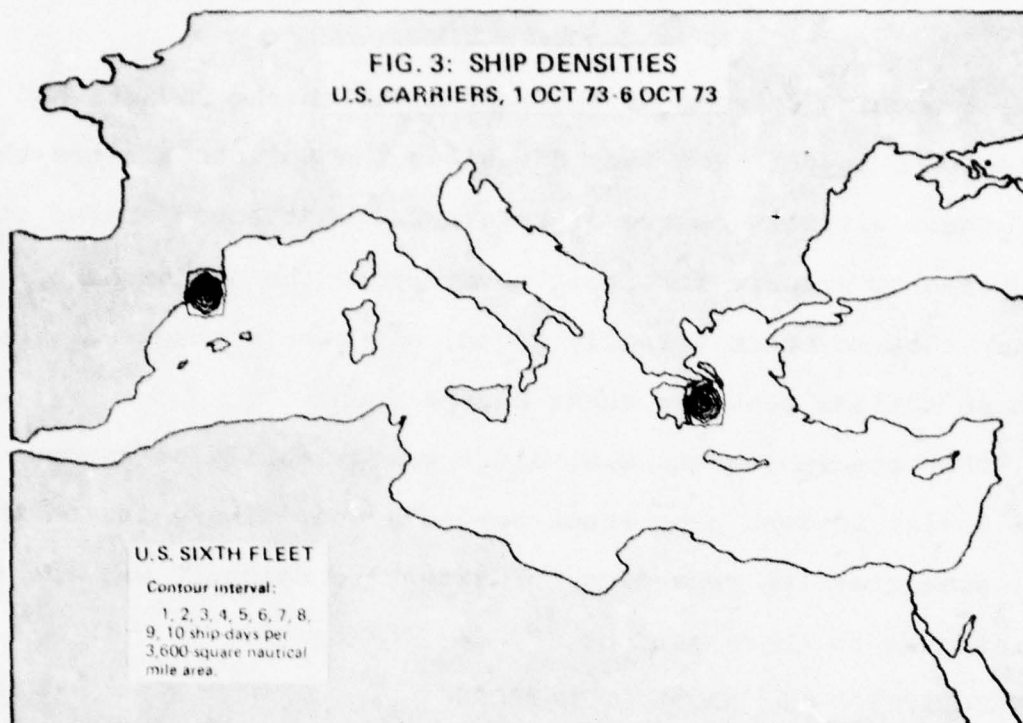
054 by the launching of some of the SCUD missiles the Soviets had made
055 available to Egypt. How many divisions the Soviets alerted this
056 time, their ultimate degree of readiness, what accompanying steps
057 were taken to prepare for their movement to the Middle East, and
058 whether that movement actually began, all remain obscure. That some
059 of these actions occurred seems beyond doubt.⁴¹

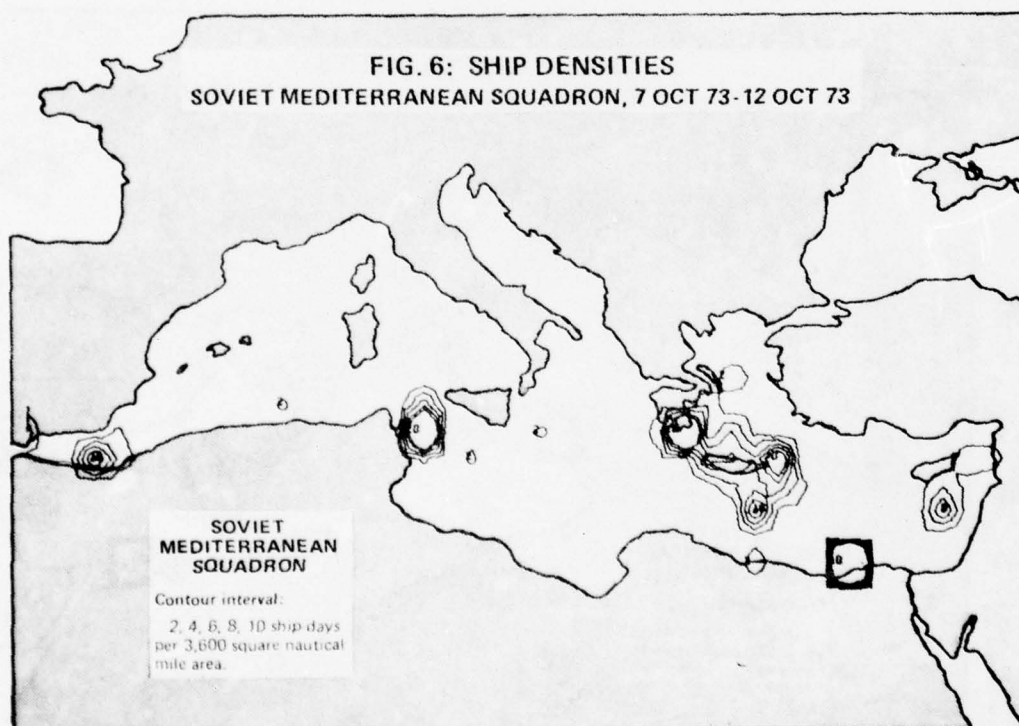
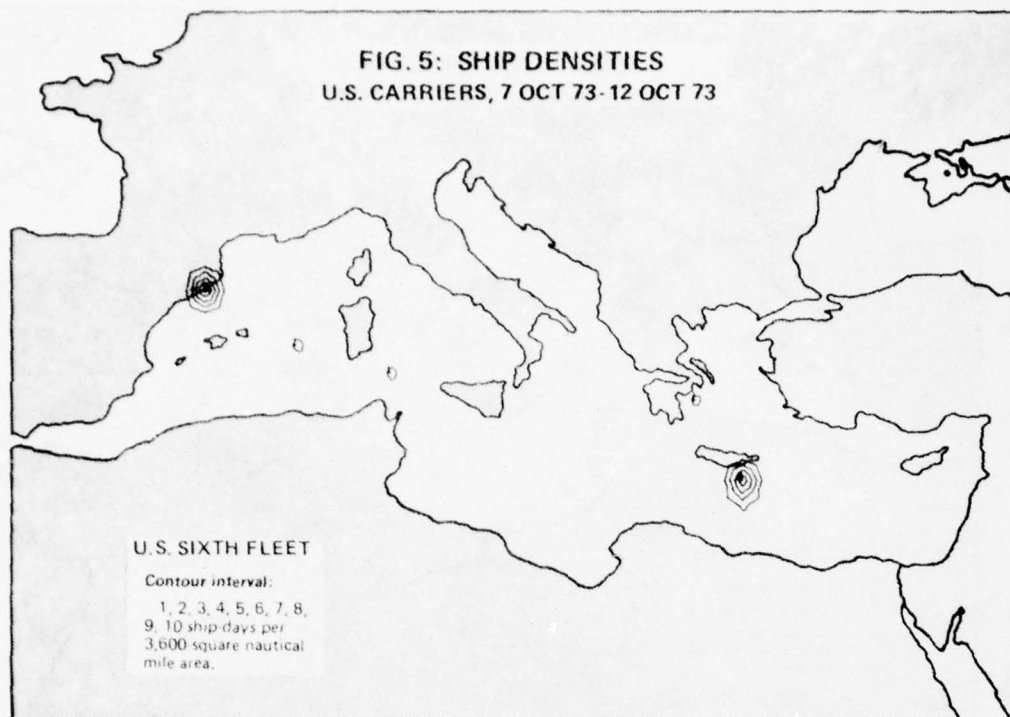
060 That the subsequent U.S. alert was primarily a response to
061 these Soviet actions also seems beyond doubt. There is, on the other
062 hand, some question regarding the extent to which it was the appropri-
063 ate response to those actions.⁴²

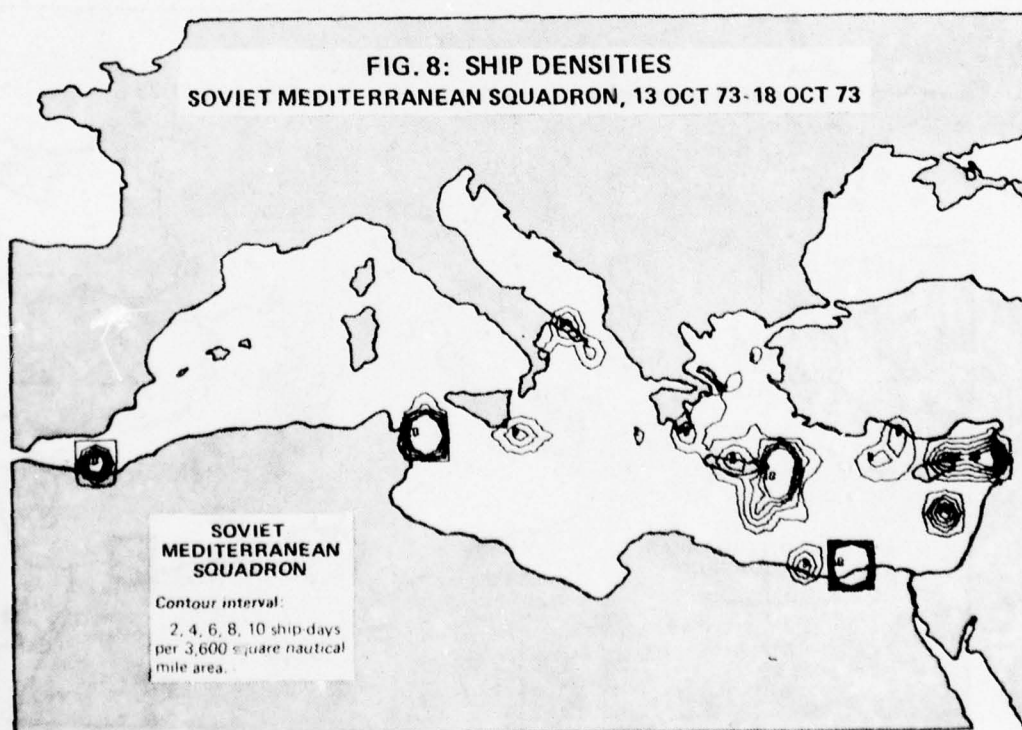
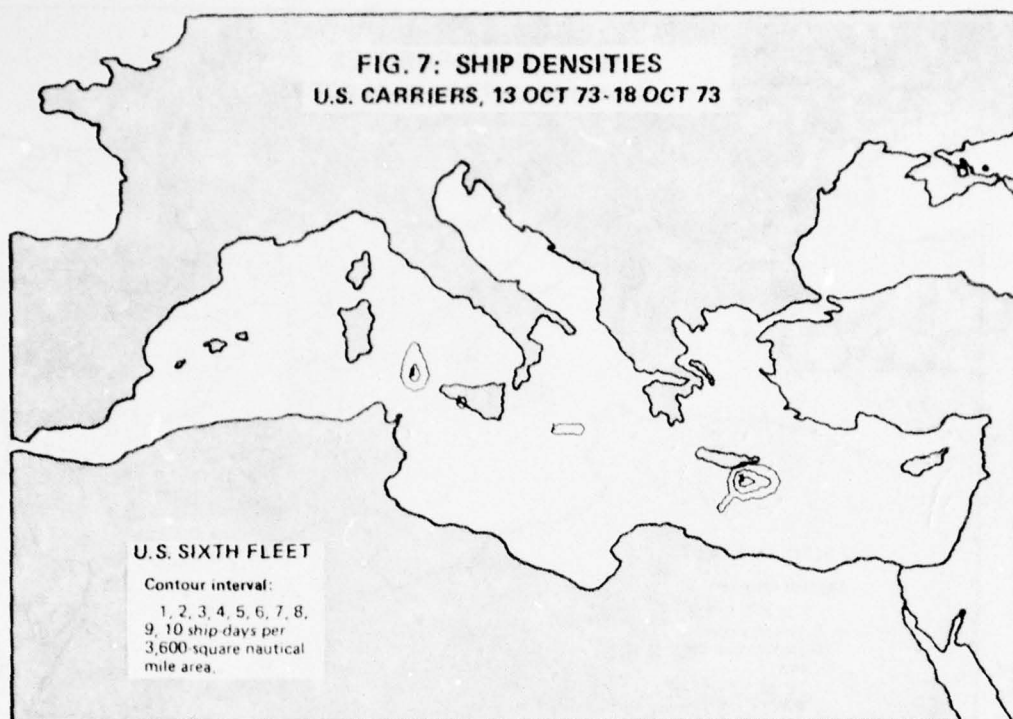
064 V. DESCRIPTIONS OF NAVAL OPERATIONS

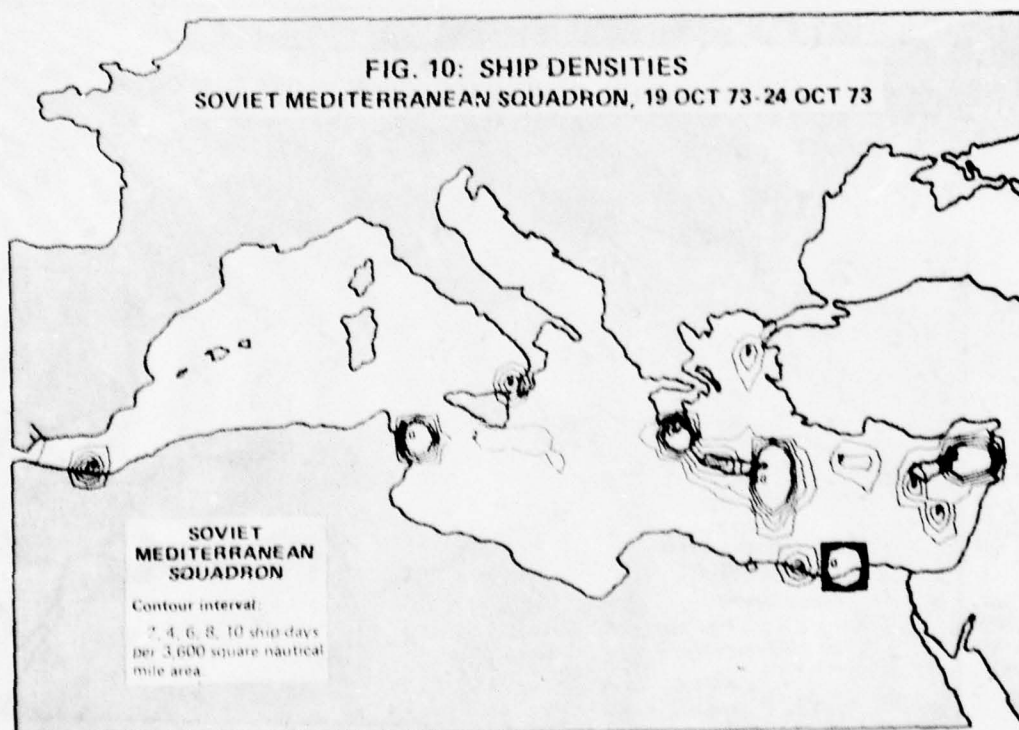
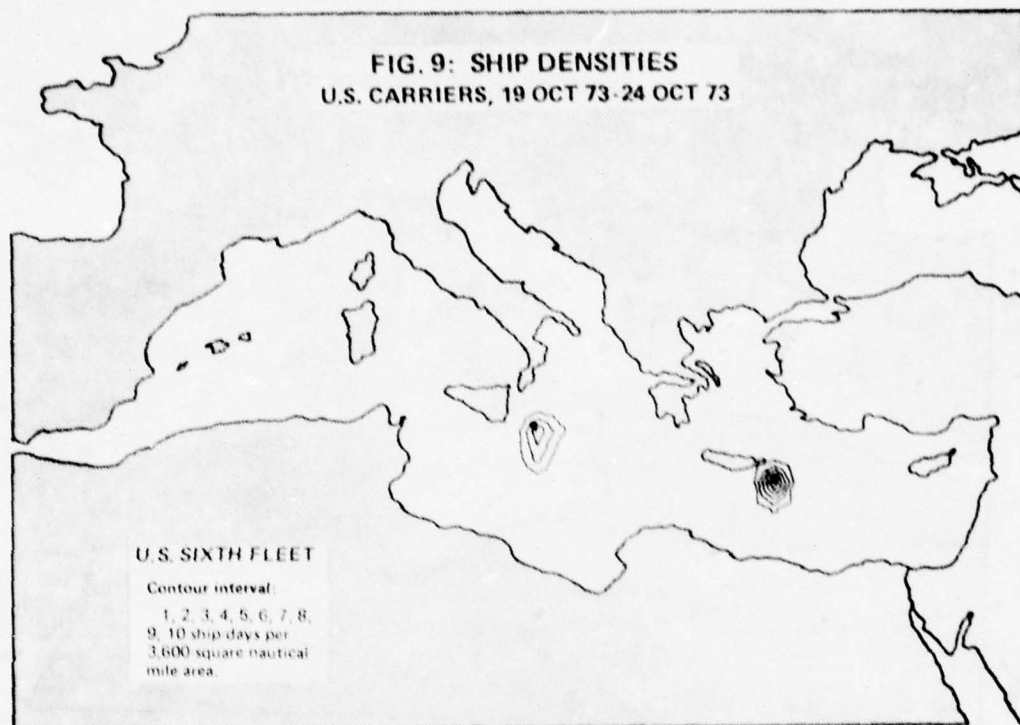
065 Figures 3 through 16 contain a considerable amount of useful
066 information on naval operations. These are contour-density plots,
067 resembling topographic maps; but instead of showing altitude, they
068 summarize the locations of ships -- in this case, the locations of
069 U.S. and Soviet ships in the Mediterranean throughout October and
070 into the first few days of November 1973.

071 This period divides rather neatly into six-day segments. The
072 first of these segments covers overt Soviet preparations for the
073 attack; the next three deal with the 18 days of the War itself, the
074 next-to-last brackets the U.S.-Soviet confrontation at sea that fol-
075 lowed the war, and the final segment covers the process of relaxation
076 that set in after the crisis had passed. And just as the period of
077 the war can be divided into uniform segments of time, the Mediterranean
078 can also be divided into approximately equal geographical units: one









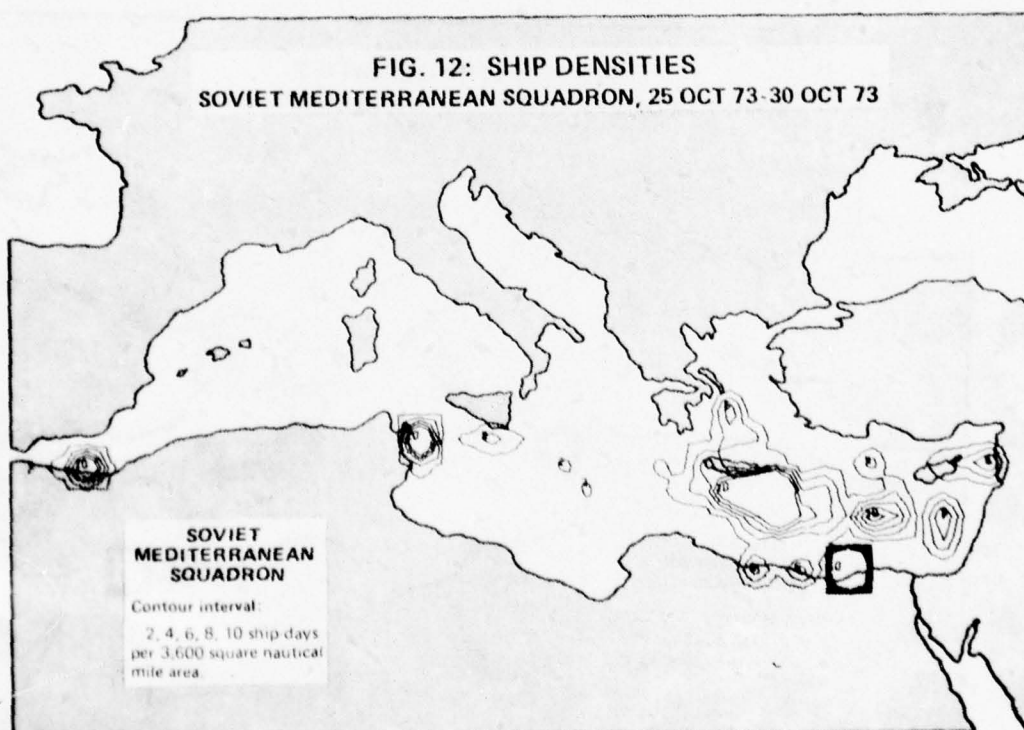
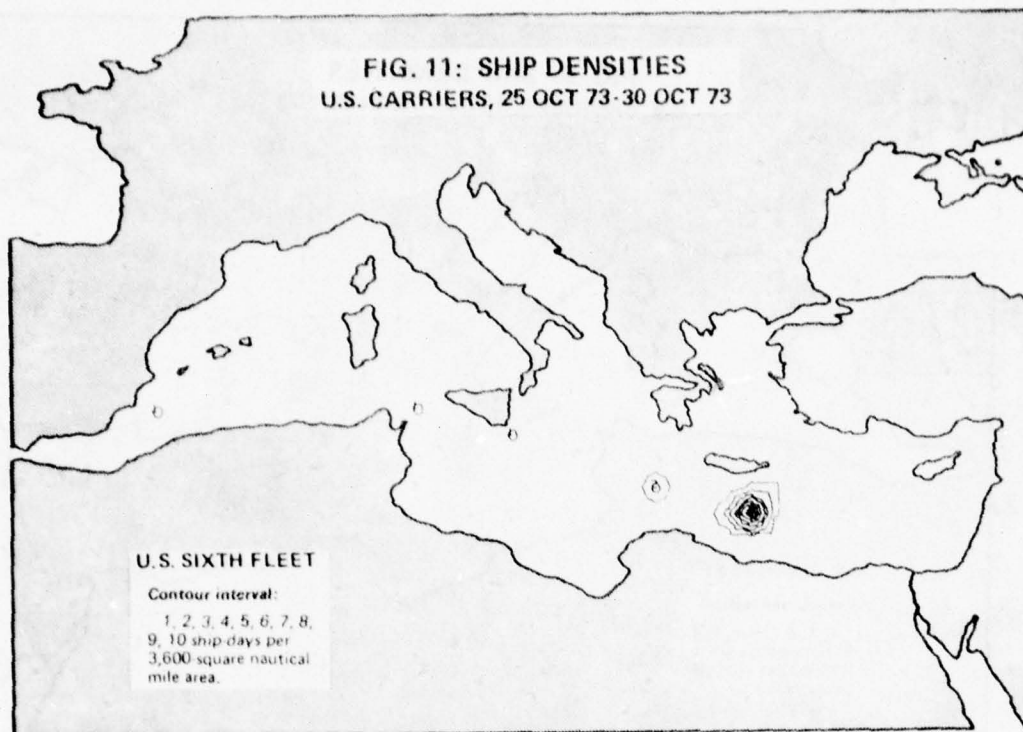


FIG. 13: SHIP DENSITIES
U.S. CARRIERS, 31 OCT 73-5 NOV 73

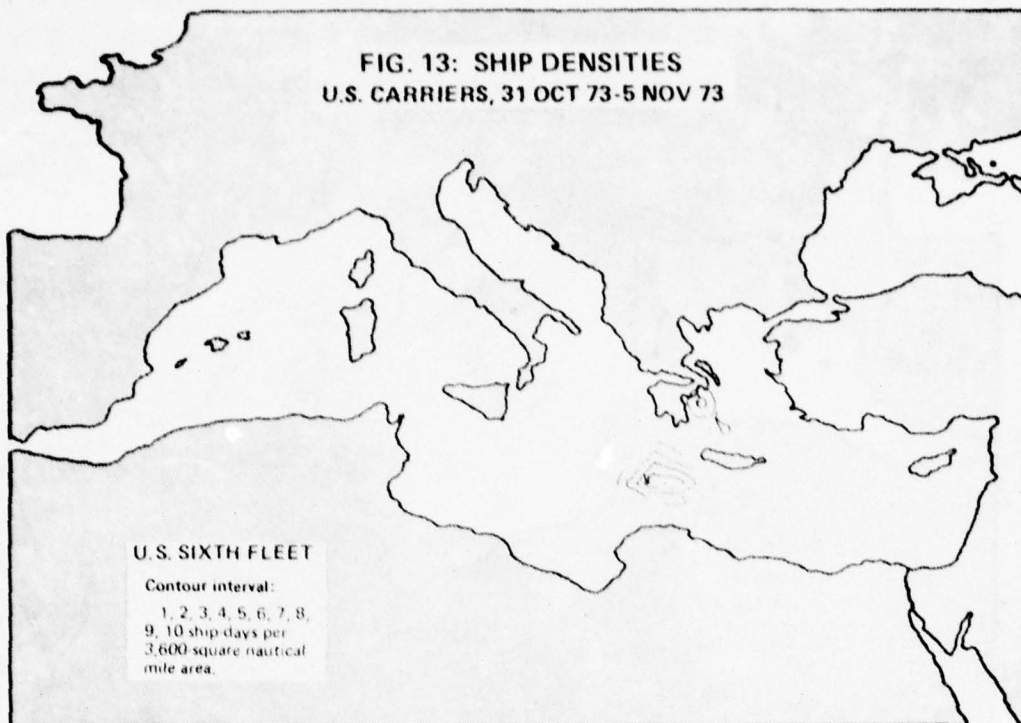
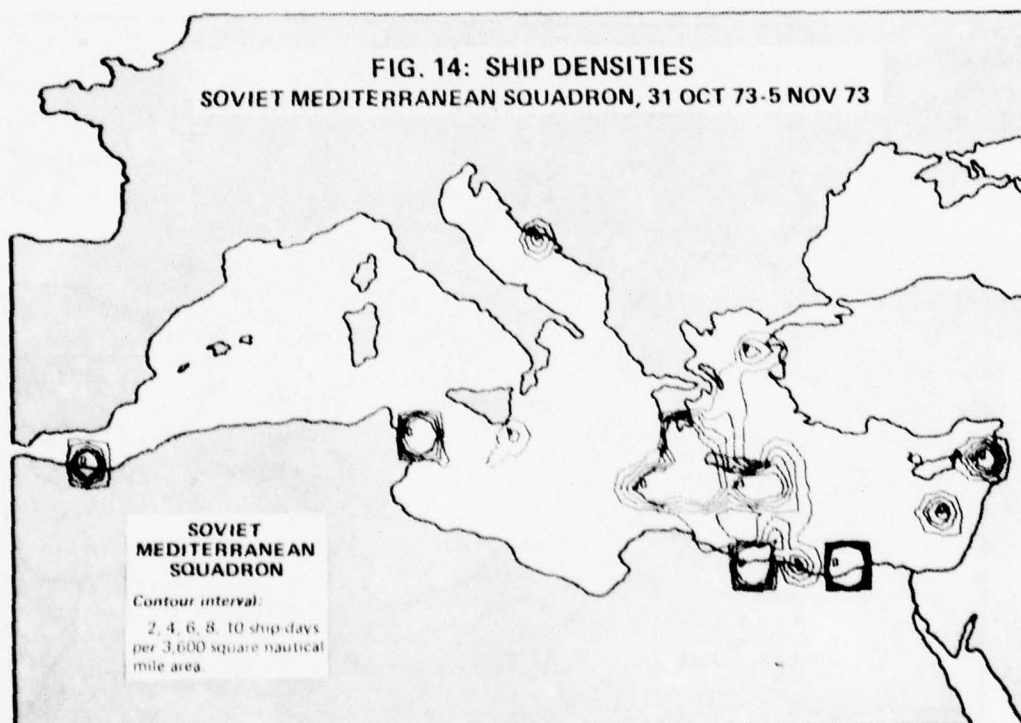
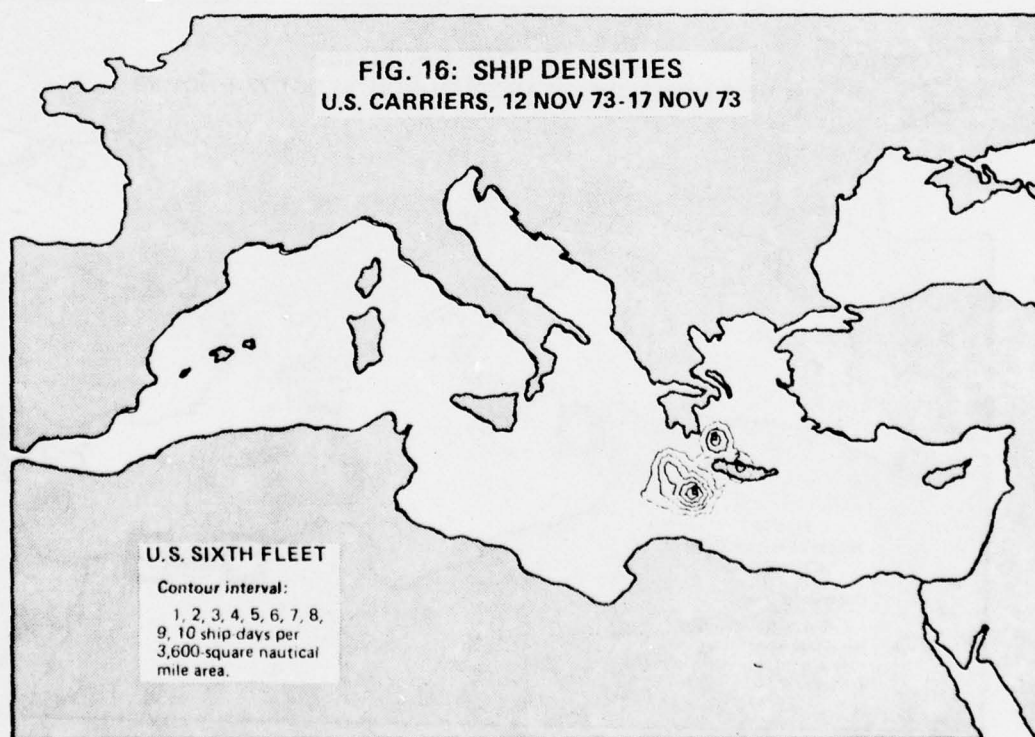
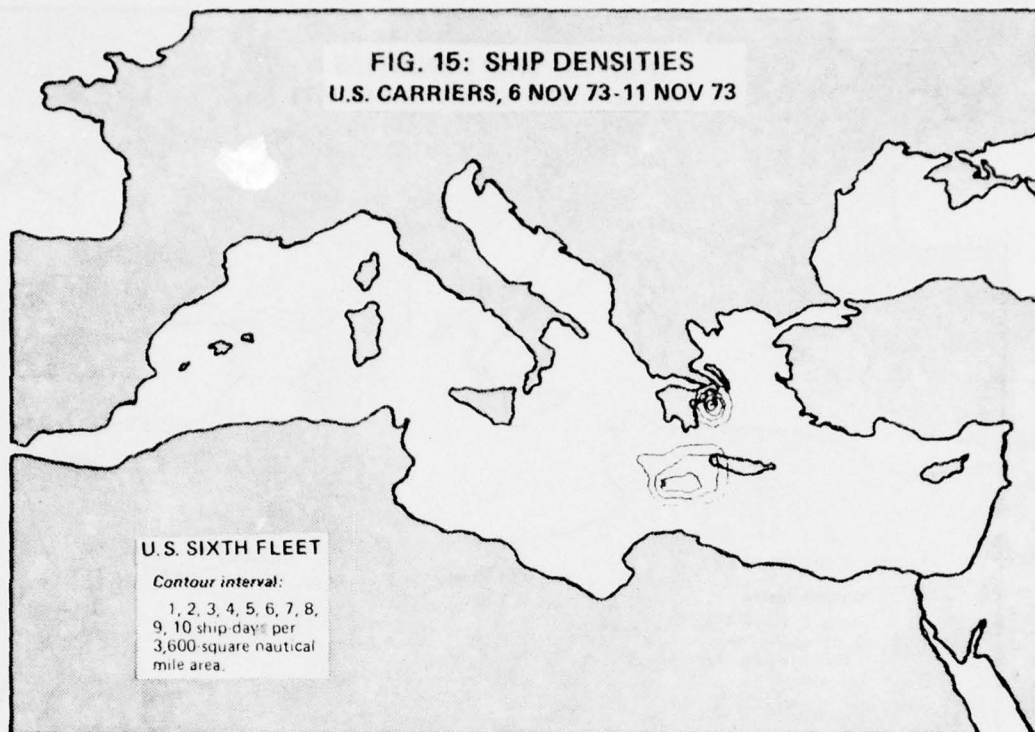


FIG. 14: SHIP DENSITIES
SOVIET MEDITERRANEAN SQUADRON, 31 OCT 73-5 NOV 73





079 degree squares, each having an area of roughly 3600 square miles.

080 Reported ship locations -- one position per day for each ship
081 operating in the Mediterranean -- have been aggregated for each six
082 day period and geographical unit. Contour lines have then been drawn
083 connecting those geographical units with total values equalling or
084 exceeding specified amounts. These contours encircle areas in which
085 naval operations of equivalent size or duration were conducted.

086 Minor distortions have been introduced in the process: for
087 example, as an artifact of a smoothing feature in the computer pro-
088 gram that produces the plots, some contour lines extend over land.
089 On the whole, however, each display accurately reflects the geographi-
090 cal distribution of forces that prevailed during the period covered;
091 and comparing one display with its successor makes possible the iden-
092 tification of major fleet movements.

093 The plots of U.S. and Soviet ship locations presented below
094 differ substantially. However, these differences do not significant-
095 ly affect their comparability. The first difference is in the composi-
096 tion of the force depicted. Aircraft carriers are the only Sixth
097 Fleet forces shown. On the other hand, all Soviet surface units
098 operating in the Mediterranean -- both combatants and auxiliaries --
099 are included in the plots depicting the Soviet Mediterranean Squadron.
100 Neither set of plots contains information on submarines. The second
101 difference is in the contour intervals on the plots themselves. The
102 lowest value shown on the Sixth Fleet plots is one ship location per

103 geographical unit per period. In effect, this makes it possible to
104 trace the day-to-day movements of individual aircraft carriers. The
105 lowest value shown on the plots of Soviet activity, however, is two
106 locations per area per period -- which precludes the identification
107 of individual units. Concentrations of forces are, nevertheless,
108 depicted with equal fidelity.*

109 VI. U.S. NAVAL ACTIVITY

110 The U.S. Sixth Fleet normally consists of some 40 to 45 ships,
111 including two aircraft carriers with 85 to 95 aircraft each and one
112 helicopter carrier with an 1800-man Marine assault force. In addi-
113 tion, it is supported by land-based reconnaissance and maritime
114 patrol aircraft. When the October War started, the fleet was near
115 this normal strength (see Table 1).** The disposition of its forces
116 within the Mediterranean was also normal***

117 By the time the War was over, the Sixth Fleet had been augmented
118 substantially: a third aircraft carrier task group had been added,
119 as had a second helicopter carrier and 1800-man Marine Amphibious
120 Unit. Furthermore, the fleet had been moved closer to the combat

121
122 *
123 The information processing tools and techniques that produce these
124 displays were developed at the Center for Naval Analyses (CNA) by
125 N. Bradford Dismukes, Jr., LCDR Frederick A. Ackley, USN, and
126 Robert G. Weinland. The accompanying plots were prepared at CNA,
126 and subsequently cleared for public release.⁴³

126 **
127 Actually, it was somewhat above its normal strength. Not counting
127 submarines, it had 45 units, reflecting a modest buildup of the
128 amphibious warfare force for impending NATO exercises and subsequent
128 relief of its ships and men.

128 ***
128 Unless otherwise indicated, all information on U.S. ship movements
129 in the Mediterranean is derived from the preceding figures.

TABLE 1:

SURFACE SHIPS (COMBATANTS AND AUXILIARIES) OPERATING WITH THE SIXTH
FLEET AT CRITICAL JUNCTURES DURING OCTOBER-NOVEMBER 1973*

	<u>05 Oct</u>	<u>26 Oct</u>	<u>18 Nov</u>
Aircraft Carriers	2	3	3
Cruisers	1	1	2
Destroyers	16	19	23
Patrol Boats	4	4	4
Amphibious Lift Ships	10	11	11
Auxiliaries	12	12	14
Total	45**	50**	57**

*

Data supplied by U.S. Navy

**

Total does not include submarines

131 zone, concentrated, and prepared for action. And it had been used
132 to carry out a variety of tasks -- fortunately without a shot hav-
133 ing been fired.

134 Both Sixth Fleet carriers were in port on 6 October when the
135 War started: the Independence in Athens, the Franklin D. Roosevelt
136 in Barcelona (Figure 3).^{*} The Independence and three destroyers were
137 ordered to sea almost immediately.⁴⁴ They had arrived on-station
138 south of Crete by the 8th, and they remained there until the War
139 was over. The FDR remained in Barcelona until the 10th, when it
140 departed for a holding area to the west of Sicily (Figure 5). On
141 the 15th, it moved further east, arriving in a new holding area to
142 the east of Sicily on the 17th. It remained in this location until
143 the 25th (Figures 7, 9, and 11).

144 The eastward movement of the FDR on 15 October was part of a
145 major redistribution of Sixth Fleet underneath the flight path of
146 U.S. transport aircraft and replacement fighter-bombers enroute to
147 Israel. Some eight locations spread out across the Mediterranean
148 from east of the Straits of Gibraltar to southwest of Cyprus were

149
150 ^{*}
151 As indicated above, the Fleet's activities are described here al-
152 most exclusively in terms of the movements of its aircraft carriers.
153 Their locations are in essence the location of the Fleet, since they
154 provide most of its firepower and it is around them that the Fleet
155 concentrates when it is preparing for action -- as it did near the
156 end of October.

157 occupied at this time (see Figure 17)* Sixth Fleet units were
158 placed in these locations to provide navigational and other direct
159 support (such as contingency search and rescue) to the transiting
160 aircraft, and possibly also to deter attempts at harassment or inter-
161 diction of these movements from the North African littoral.**⁴⁵

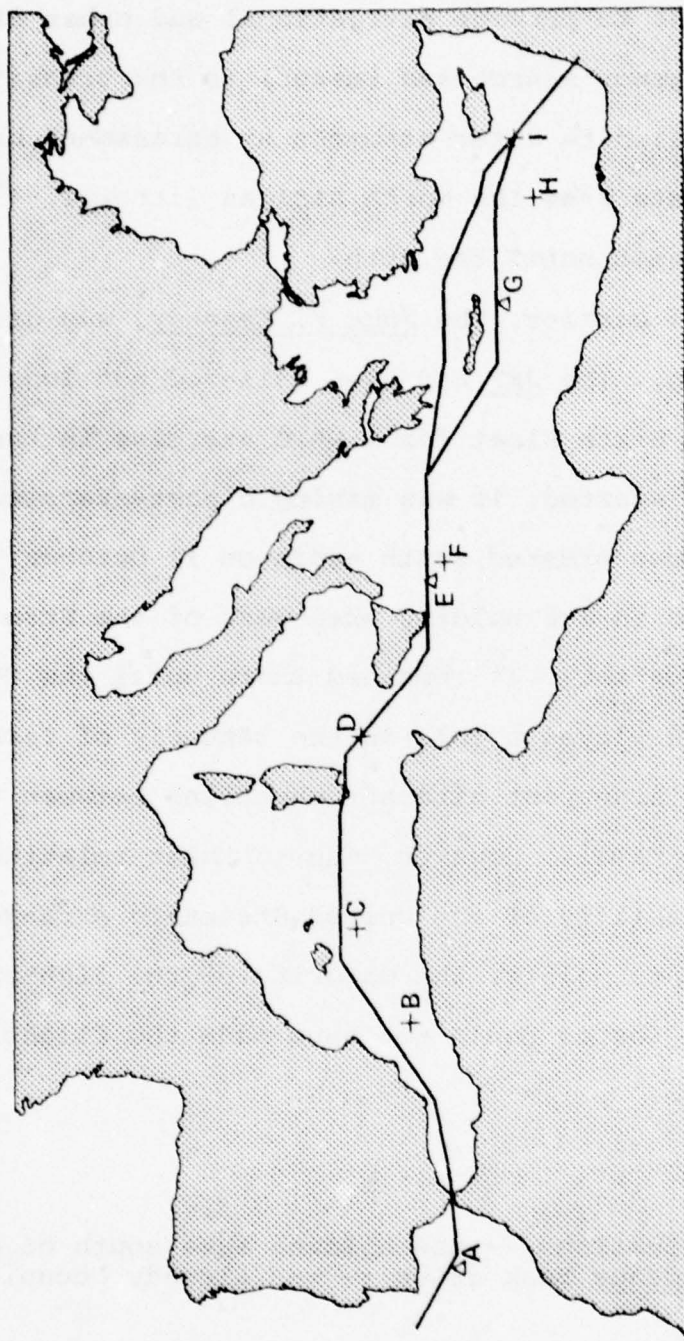
162 These locations were manned until the 25th.

163 Meanwhile, a third carrier, the John F. Kennedy, was ordered
164 toward the Mediterranean. The JFK had been relieved not long before
165 by the FDR and departed Sixth Fleet for a NATO exercise in the North
166 Atlantic. When the War started, it was making a post-exercise port
167 visit in Scotland. It was ordered south again on 11 October, left
168 on the 13th, and arrived in its holding area west of the Straits of
169 Gibraltar not long thereafter. It remained there until the 25th.⁴⁶

170 All three carriers played a role in the resupply of Israel.
171 The support required by transport aircraft shuttling between the
172 Azores and Israel was minimal. However, due to their relatively
173 short range, and the inability of the United States to arrange land-
174 ing rights at intermediate points, the majority of the fighter-bombers
175 sent to replace Israeli losses could not have made the flight with-
176 out extensive assistance.

177 _____
177 *
177 At least one of these locations -- the holding area south of Crete
178 assigned to the Independence task group -- was already occupied.

178 **
179 Earlier in the year, Libya had demonstrated both the willingness and the
180 capability to undertake such actions. On March 21, Libyan fighters
181 attacked an American reconnaissance aircraft over international waters
182 some 83 miles from the Libyan coast. Algeria also had the capability
183 to interfere, but had demonstrated no inclination to do so.⁴⁷



△ AIRCRAFT CARRIERS (Appx. locations)

A CVA 67 John F. Kennedy
E CVA 42 Franklin D. Roosevelt
G CV 62 Independence

+ DESTROYERS

B DLG 17 HE Yarnell
C DE 1043 E McDonnell
D DDG 5 CV Ricketts
F DLG 14 Dewey
H DLG 9 Coontz
I DLG 26 Belknap

FIG. 17: ROUTE OF U. S. AIRLIFT TO ISRAEL AND LOCATIONS OF SIXTH FLEET SHIPS SUPPORTING TRANSITING AIRCRAFT*

*Data supplied by U. S. Air Force and U. S. Navy

184 The F-4 PHANTOMS could fly non-stop from Lajes in the Azores
185 to Israel,* but required inflight refueling, which was provided by
186 SAC KC-135s. The A-4 SKYHAWKS, on the other hand, did not have this
187 endurance. Staging from Lajes, these aircraft were refueled east of
188 the Straits of Gibraltar by tankers launched from the JFK. They then
189 flew on to the FDR. After remaining aboard the FDR overnight they
190 continued on to Israel, refueling once more south of Crete from
191 tankers launched by the Independence.⁴⁸

192 Coincident with the declaration of the worldwide DEFCON III
193 alert on the 25th, Sixth Fleet was both augmented and concentrated;
194 and while the airlift continued, most of the support stations occupied
195 by Sixth Fleet units were vacated. The JFK was ordered to reenter
196 the Mediterranean and join the other two carriers.⁴⁹ The FDR arrived
197 in the vicinity of the Independence southeast of Crete on the 26th,
198 and the JFK arrived in a subsequently designated operating area to
199 the southwest of Crete on the 27th. That alert disposition was main-
200 tained until the 30th, when the two easternmost carriers moved west
201 (Figure 11). The Independence returned to Athens shortly thereafter,
202 and the FDR joined the JFK. This somewhat more relaxed disposition
203 was maintained until November 12th, when all three carriers were
204 again located at sea (Figures 13, 15, 16). Increased readiness,
205 which had been established in the Sixth Fleet on October 6th, was
206 maintained there through November 17th.⁵⁰ When it was finally re-
207 laxated, Fleet operations returned more or less to normal, and the JFK
208 departed the Sixth Fleet once again.

209 _____
209 *
209 The first group of F-4s actually flew non-stop from the United States
to Israel.

210 Sixth Fleet played no role in the War itself. It remained
211 well outside the combat zone, and was not challenged directly by
212 any of the belligerents. On the other hand, it had a significant
213 effect on the War's outcome -- playing a major role in U.S. diplo-
214 matic efforts to contain, isolate and eventually suppress the con-
215 flict. Its strength, disposition and activities were tightly con-
216 trolled and consciously manipulated to provide signals reflecting and
217 reinforcing those diplomatic efforts. Most of those signals were
218 directed at the Soviet Union; some, however, were intended for the
219 belligerents.

220 The initial U.S. reaction to the outbreak of the conflict was
221 muted. This was probably a reflection of the widespread expectation
222 that events would provide a rough parallel to June 1967: a short war,
223 ending in an Israeli victory. It also may have reflected a "lesson
224 learned" in the June War, when the proximity of Sixth Fleet carriers
225 to the combat zone lent at least minimal plausibility to the other-
226 wise implausible Egyptian charge that U.S. aircraft had participated
227 in the Israeli "first strike" -- which, in fact, they had not.⁵²
228 Sixth Fleet's initial movements -- from the 6th through the 14th --
229 were obviously intended to provide two signals: that the United
230 States was concerned about the outbreak of conflict and prepared to
231 take action if necessary; but that, fundamentally, it didn't want
232 to become involved, and didn't want the Soviets to become involved,
233 and therefore was exercising restraint.⁵³ The first of these signals --

234 U.S. readiness to take action -- was given by the departure of the
235 Independence and its escorts from Athens and their subsequent move-
236 ment toward the combat zone. The second signal -- U.S. restraint --
237 was manifested in several ways. The holding area taken up by the
238 Independence task group was not only well outside the combat zone
239 but significantly further away from the scene of conflict than the
240 position occupied by the Sixth Fleet in the last comparable Mideast
241 conflict: the Jordanian Civil War in September, 1970.⁵⁴ Furthermore,
242 the second Sixth Fleet carrier -- the FDR -- was conspicuously kept
243 in Barcelona until the scheduled conclusion of its visit; and when
244 it did put to sea it was held in the western Mediterranean. In
245 addition, while steps were taken during this initial period to provide
246 for the augmentation of the Sixth Fleet, restraint prevailed. The JFK
247 and half of its escorts, which were making port visits in Scotland,
248 remained there until their scheduled departure dates. They were then
249 diverted to a holding area west of the Straits of Gibraltar -- outside
250 the Mediterranean.⁵⁵ The other half of the JFK's escorts were operat-
251 ing in the Baltic, and continued their scheduled exercises and port
252 visits (they were not ordered back to the Mediterranean until the
253 25th, when the JFK was sent in).⁵⁶ The helicopter carrier Iwo Jima,
254 which had been scheduled to deploy to the Mediterranean in mid-November,
255 was sent a month early; but while it was prepared for departure and
256 its Marines and their equipment were loaded in the glare of publicity,
257 the entire process reflected a desire to "make haste slowly."⁵⁷

258 When it became obvious to the United States that this restraint
259 was not being reciprocated by the Soviets, and that it could not as
260 had been hoped escape some degree of involvement in the conflict, the
261 United States changed its posture -- mounting a massive airlift (and a
262 substantial sealift) to resupply Israel. The airlift began on 13
263 October, with the first transport landing in Israel on the night of
264 the 14th. On the 15th, the Sixth Fleet was dispersed across the
265 Mediterranean. In this configuration it was extremely vulnerable:
266 carriers were operating without their full complement of escorts, and
267 escorts were operating outside the defensive envelopes provided by
268 the carriers' aircraft. As indicated above, this disposition was
269 necessitated by the requirement to support the transiting aircraft;
270 but as long as it remained dispersed, Sixth Fleet was giving a
271 clear -- although unintentional -- signal to all concerned that it
272 was not about to undertake any offensive actions.

273 In implementing the increased readiness requirements that ac-
274 companied the establishment of the DEFCON III Alert, Sixth Fleet
275 adopted exactly the opposite posture. It concentrated, thereby --
276 and quite intentionally -- signalling that it might undertake offen-
277 sive actions. During the subsequent period of alert in the Sixth
278 Fleet* -- i.e., from 25 October through 17 November -- additional and
279 equally significant changes were made in the Fleet's strength and
280 disposition. Some of these changes represented deliberate attempts
281 to signal the Soviets. Others, although initiated for operational
282 reasons, contained implicit signals.

283

284

*

284 Increased readiness was maintained in the Sixth Fleet long after the
285 DEFCON III measures had been relaxed in other theaters.

286 The augmentation of Sixth Fleet coincided with the declaration
287 of DEFCON III, but that was partly by chance. The Iwo Jima had left
288 the United States on 16 October, and just happened to enter the
289 Mediterranean within hours of the alert.* On the other hand, the
290 entry of the JFK task group at roughly the same time was not happen-
291 stance. It had been holding just outside the Mediterranean for the
292 better part of ten days -- a deliberate signal to the Soviets that the
293 United States was exercising restraint -- and it was ordered into the
294 Mediterranean to amplify the very different signal that was now being
295 given.

296 Furthermore, when the Fleet concentrated, the location in which
297 it concentrated was the holding area south of Crete that had been
298 occupied by the Independence task group since the first days of the
299 war. This was close to if not directly underneath the flight path
300 of the Soviet airlift of the previous two weeks. The Soviets had
301 stopped flying on 23 October, possibly in order to load airborne
302 forces for intervention in Egypt.⁵⁸ Had they restarted the airlift
303 across the Mediterranean to move those forces, the Sixth Fleet would
304 have been in an ideal position to interdict such a movement.** This

305 _____
306 *
307 Its deployment to the Mediterranean was, of course, a deliberate
308 gesture; the coincidence of its entry with the alert, however, was
309 just that: coincidence.

310 **
311 Its location was beyond the range of Soviet fighter escorts, and
between potential Egyptian fighter escorts and the incoming trans-
ports. If the Soviets had elected to take a more direct route,
avoiding the Mediterranean, they would have been vulnerable to inter-
ception by the Israelis.

312 was a signal the Soviets could hardly ignore.

312 On 30 October, the Independence and FDR moved west to join
313 the JFK task group in a new and much larger holding area southwest
314 of Crete. This movement, which had been delayed by heavy weather,
315 was undertaken to provide more room for maneuver.**⁵⁹ It had the
316 effect, though, of moving Sixth Fleet even further away from the
317 combat zone. This gave the Soviets yet another clear -- and unin-
318 tentional, but in the end not unwelcome -- signal: the United
319 States was relaxing. That signal was reinforced on 3 November when
320 the Independence returned to Athens.

321

322 *

323 The Soviets had begun targeting surface-to-surface missiles against
324 the carriers on 26 October. Holding the carriers within a small,
325 fixed radius of a fixed point simplified the targeting problem signi-
326 ficantly, and the carriers became extremely vulnerable. Giving the
327 carriers room to maneuver complicated the targeting problem again --
328 reducing their vulnerability somewhat.

001 VIII. SOVIET NAVAL ACTIVITY

002 Precise figures on the strength and composition of Soviet naval
003 forces in the Mediterranean immediately prior to the outbreak of the
004 War have not been made public. Enough information is available,
005 though, to enable reasonable estimates of the relevant figures to
006 be made.

007 The total number of Soviet naval units operating in the Medi-
008 terranean varies. Since 1971, when the rate of growth in their
009 presence there slowed, and with the exception of 1973, the annual
010 average* has fluctuated between 50 and 55 units. The annual average
011 for 1973, which was inflated by deployments undertaken after the
012 war broke out, was slightly over 56 units.⁶⁰

013 Most of the units located in the Mediterranean prior to the
014 War would have been attached to the Soviet Mediterranean Squadron.**
015 However, since the Mediterranean is not only an operating area but
016 also the transit route to and from the Black Sea, some of those
017 units would have been located there only because they were enroute
018 somewhere else.

019 _____
020 *
021 Obtained by dividing the reported ship day total for the year by 365.
022

022 **
023 There is no general agreement as to precisely what this organization
024 should be called. In Soviet terminology it is the "V Eskadra" (or
025 Squadron). The United States officially refers to it as the "Soviet
026 Mediterranean Fleet" -- a term considered to reflect more accurately
027 its size and firepower. Perusal of Webster's provides little solace
028 here: "fleet" is defined as a "number of warships under a single
029 command;" "squadron" is defined as "a naval unit consisting of two
030 or more divisions [tactical subdivisions] and sometimes additional
031 vessels." "Squadron" seems somewhat less amorphous and consequently
032 is used throughout.

033 Given these fluctuations, the normal size and composition of
034 the Squadron is more readily described in terms of a range of varia-
035 tion for each of several component force types (see Table 2). Some
036 of the fluctuations within this range are accounted for by units oper-
037 ating with the Squadron for brief periods while enroute to or from
038 the Black Sea. Some fluctuations are produced when units operating
039 with the Squadron are replaced: reductions occur when units depart
040 the Mediterranean before the arrival of those that are to relieve
041 them; increases occur when there is overlap in the presence of re-
042 lieving and relieved units. Other increases reflect temporary de-
043 ployments for specific operations such as exercises, or reinforcement
044 of the Squadron during crises.

045 Crisis reinforcements of the Mediterranean Squadron show few
046 clear patterns. The most readily identified patterns are reflec-
047 tions of the restrictions imposed on the Soviets by the Montreux
048 Convention, which regulates passage through the Turkish Straits.*

049

050 *

051 The Convention, which has been in effect for 40 years, places signi-
052 ficant limits only on the rate at which the Soviets can reinforce
053 their Mediterranean Squadron. It does so by denying passage to cer-
054 tain types of ships -- forcing the Soviets to deploy augmenting forces
055 from other, more distant areas -- and by controlling the flow of those
056 types of ships that are allowed passage. Operational deployments to
057 the Mediterranean by the submarines of the Black Sea Fleet are pro-
058 hibited, so augmenting submarines must come from the other Western
059 fleet areas. Almost all of these come from the Northern Fleet, which
060 also supplies the normal complement of submarines that operate in the
061 Mediterranean. There are no such prohibitions against the operational
062 deployment of Black Sea Fleet surface combatants and auxiliaries, but
063 the number and total tonnage of combatants permitted to be in transit
064 through the Straits each day are constrained. In effect, one cruiser
065 and two accompanying destroyers, or five destroyers, represent the
066 practical daily limits for Soviet deployments. The Soviets must also
067 give eight days' advance notice before any transit can be initiated.
068 By filing declarations for many more transits than they actually under-
069 take, and modifying the apparent identities of individual units to
070 match those "extra" declarations, the Soviets have been able to mini-
071 mize, but not completely circumvent, the effects of this latter re-
072 striction.

TABLE 2: "NORMAL" SOVIET MEDITERRANEAN
SQUADRON COMPOSITION*

Submarines

8-10 Torpedo attack

2-3 Cruise missile

Total Submarines 10-13

Surface Combatants

2-4 Cruiser types

9-12 Destroyer types

2-3 Minesweepers

1-3 Amphibious lift ships

Total Surface
Combatants 14-22

Auxiliaries

18-20 Support ships (replenishment,
repair, etc.)

5-6 Survey/Research ships

Total Auxiliaries 23-26

"Normal" Squadron Strength 47-61

*

Data from: Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Understanding Soviet Naval Developments: Background Material for Addressing Soviet Naval Developments by U.S. Naval Personnel, April 1974, p. 11; [a revised edition, published in April 1975 by the U.S. Government Printing Office, gives slightly different figures for minesweepers (1-3) and support ships (15-20), and therefore, "normal" strength (43-61). With one exception, the figures from the earlier edition are closer to and hence probably more representative of the prewar situation in 1973, so they are given above. The exception is the torpedo attack submarine strength, which reportedly stabilized at a higher level after the October War than had been the norm before the war.]

073 Crisis reinforcement of the Mediterranean Squadron is itself
074 a variable: it does not always occur; and, as shown in Figure 18
075 below, when the Squadron is reinforced, the magnitude and timing of
076 these reinforcements are often quite dissimilar. To some extent,
077 these dissimilarities reflect dissimilarities in the course of de-
078 velopment of each individual crisis.

079 The Israelis achieved tactical surprise in the June 1967 war,
080 but no one was surprised that conflict occurred. The Soviets saw it
081 coming and deployed in anticipation of its occurrence. Everyone was
082 surprised by the Jordanian Civil War in 1970. In that case, however,
083 the Soviets did not augment the Squadron significantly -- perhaps
084 because they didn't want to become involved; perhaps because, given
085 the built-in constraint on their capability for rapid response, any
086 action they might have intended was overtaken by events.

087 In October 1973, although they knew beforehand that conflict
088 was imminent, the Soviets did not deploy augmenting forces from the
089 Black Sea in advance of its outbreak. And those steps they did take
090 to augment the Squadron before the outbreak of conflict were care-
091 fully masked -- most likely because they wanted to avoid "telegraphing"
092 strategic warning that something was about to occur, but possibly
093 also because they wanted to avoid creating the impression that they
094 had played a role in the conflict's initiation.

095 Once the War was underway, however, the Soviets carried out a
096 large-scale reinforcement of their Mediterranean Squadron. By Octo-
097 ber 31st, the Squadron had reached a total strength of 96 ships -- an

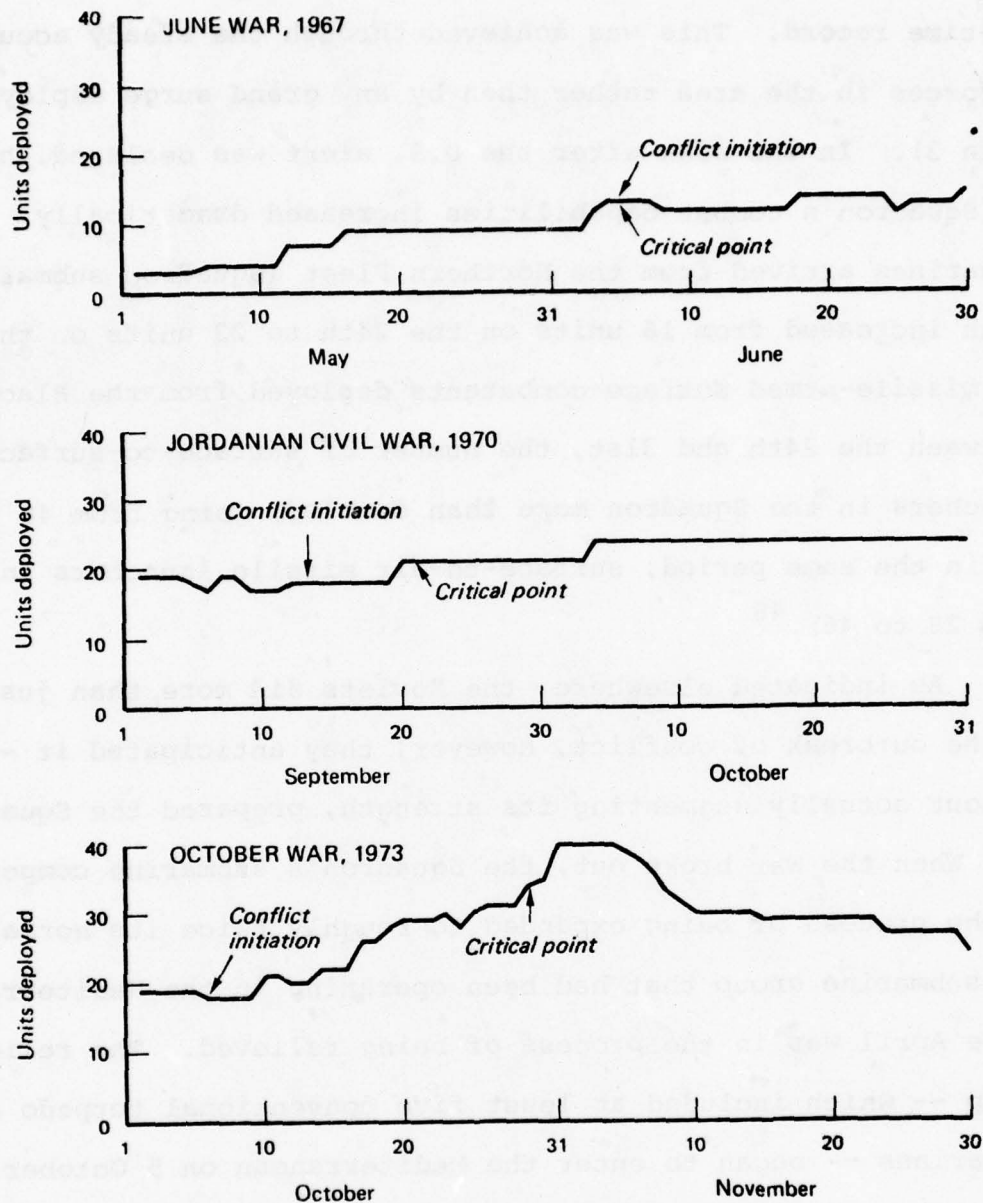


FIG. 18: NUMBER OF SURFACE COMBATANTS DEPLOYED FROM THE BLACK SEA DURING INTERNATIONAL CRISES*

*Data from: Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Rapport Annuel sur le Mouvement des Navires a travers les Detroits Turcs*, (1968, 1971, 1974 editions). For definitions and methodology, see: Robert G. Weinland, "Soviet Transits of the Turkish Straits, 1945-1970," Arlington, Va: Center for Naval Analysis, Professional Paper No. 94, 1974 (reprinted in: McGwire (ed.), *Soviet Naval Developments: Capability and Context*, New York: Praeger, 1973, pp. 325-343).

098 all-time record. This was achieved through the steady accumulation
099 of forces in the area rather than by any grand surge deployment (see
100 Table 3). In the week after the U.S. alert was declared, however,
101 the Squadron's combat capabilities increased dramatically. Additional
102 submarines arrived from the Northern Fleet (Squadron submarine str-
103 ength increased from 16 units on the 24th to 23 units on the 31st),
104 and missile-armed surface combatants deployed from the Black Sea
105 (between the 24th and 31st, the number of surface-to-surface missile
106 launchers in the Squadron more than doubled, going from 40 to 88;
107 and in the same period, surface-to-air missile launchers increased
108 from 28 to 46).⁴⁶

109 As indicated elsewhere, the Soviets did more than just react
110 to the outbreak of conflict, however; they anticipated it -- and,
111 without actually augmenting its strength, prepared the Squadron for
112 it. When the War broke out, the Squadron's submarine component was
113 in the process of being expanded to roughly twice its normal size.
114 The submarine group that had been operating in the Mediterranean
115 since April was in the process of being relieved. The relieving
116 group -- which included at least five conventional torpedo attack
117 submarines -- began to enter the Mediterranean on 5 October, the
118 day before the War started. The group being relieved then delayed
119 its return voyage to the Northern Fleet.⁶² The delay is not
120 surprising. That the replacement occurred may not be surprising
121 either. It may have been nothing more than coincidence. Then again,
122 while conclusive evidence is lacking, given Soviet foreknowledge,
123 this easily could have been an anticipatory reinforcement.

TABLE 3: TOTAL NUMBER OF SOVIET SURFACE COMBATANTS DEPLOYED FROM THE BLACK SEA AT CRITICAL JUNCTURES DURING OCTOBER - NOVEMBER*

	<u>05 Oct</u>	<u>24 Oct</u>	<u>31 Oct</u>	<u>18 Nov</u>
Cruisers	2	3	4	3
Destroyers	6	9	12	8
(Escorts) (1)	5	6	8	7
Minesweepers	2	2	4	3
Amphibious lift ships (2)	<u>2</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>4</u>
Total	17	26 (3)	36 (3)	25

- (1) Includes units then classed as DE, PCE, PGGP, PTFG. Four of the latter left the Black Sea during this period. Since PTFG's do not as a rule operate with the Squadron, and none of these particular units returned to the Black Sea, they were probably enroute delivery to other countries -- possibly Syria -- and thus are not included in these totals.
- (2) LSTs and LSMs. One additional unit was present in early November. It entered the Mediterranean through the Straits of Gibraltar, and thus may have been the LST normally located in the vicinity of Conakry, Guinea.
- (3) Total surface combatant strength was reported by COMSIXTHFLT to be 26 units on the 24th and 34 units on the 31st.** The difference in totals for the 31st probably reflects movements through the Straits of Gibraltar.

*

Data from: Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Rapport Annuel Sur Le Mouvement des Navires a Travers Les Detroits Turcs: 1973, Ankara, January 1974.

**

COMSIXTHFLT report, quoted in: Admiral Elmo R. Zumwalt, Jr., On Watch: A Memoir, New York: Quadrangle/The New York Times Book Co., 1976, p. 447.

124 A second fact, the significance of which is not really clear,
125 is revealed in the record of Soviet movements through the Turkish
126 Straits. The Nikolaev, the lead ship of the new KARA-class guided
127 missile cruiser, which had deployed on 21 September, returned to
128 the Black Sea on 5 October, the day before the War started. This
129 action may appear more significant when it is noted that, although
130 sitting next door in the Black Sea, no third (KARA, KRIVAK) or se-
131 cond (KRESTA, MOSKVA) and only a few first generation (KASHIN, KYNDA)
132 modern surface combatants were present in the Mediterranean when the
133 War started. It is almost as though the Soviets, knowing conflict
134 was imminent and fearing that their naval forces might become di-
135 rectly involved, decided to minimize the potential damage they might
136 suffer through such involvement by withholding their newer, more
137 capable units and deploying their older, less capable units -- the
138 loss of which would not be crippling.⁶³

139 1 - 6 October

140 In the period immediately before the outbreak of the War on
141 6 October, the Squadron's general disposition throughout the Medi-
142 terranean was roughly what one would expect to find during any period
143 of normalcy -- except at its far eastern end, where there were poten-
144 tially significant abnormalities (see Fig. 4).* Few of the Squadron's

145

146 *

147 Unless otherwise indicated all information of Soviet ship movements
148 within the Mediterranean is derived from Figures 4, 6, 8, 10, 12
149 and 14.

150 surface combatants or auxiliaries appear to have been at sea.* The
151 bulk of the force was located at the established anchorages (west
152 of Melilla, in the Gulf of Hammamet, and off Kithira Island)• and
153 in Egyptian ports (primarily Alexandria, but also Mersa Matruh and
154 Port Said). A port visit was in progress in Yugoslavia.

155 One unit that normally would have been at sea -- and was -- was
156 the surface combatant trailing the easternmost Sixth Fleet carrier.
157 It was waiting off Athens for the Independence to put to sea. There
158 was no such tattletale waiting off Barcelona for the FDR. This was
159 also normal, since as a general rule carriers are not trailed in
160 the Western Mediterranean except during crises -- and as yet there
161 was no crisis.

162 The anomalies in the far Eastern Mediterranean are more easily
163 identified than explained. The intelligence collector (AGI) normally
164 located off the Israeli coast should have been at sea throughout
165 this period, but apparently it was not. In addition, the Squadron's

166 _____
167 *
168 This is an estimate. The plots upon which this description of Soviet
169 activity is based do not reveal individual ship locations, the low-
170 est level displayed being two ship days per one degree square in each
171 six day period. Major operations (a large number of ships operating
172 together, or even a single ship operating in one location for several
173 days) are displayed. Low-level activity (an individual ship transit,
174 for instance) is not displayed.

175 amphibious lift force -- generally one ALLIGATOR-class LST and two
176 POLNOCHNY-class LSMs, but now just the latter -- normally would have
177 been located in Port Said throughout the period. Those units put
178 to sea on the 5th, however.⁶⁴ These movements, undertaken in anti-
179 cipation of the outbreak of conflict, were the first of a number of
180 significant changes that occurred in the disposition and activity
181 of the Squadron. The only change in the strength of the Squadron's
182 surface component during this period was the departure of the KARA-
183 class cruiser Nikolaev, noted above.

184 7 - 12 October

185 In the period immediately after the outbreak of the War, addi-
186 tional and far more significant changes were made in the disposition
187 of the Squadron (see Fig. 6). This was largely in response to the
188 movement of the Independence south of Crete -- toward the scene of
189 the conflict. A major concentration of Soviet forces was established
190 in the immediate vicinity of the holding area occupied by the Inde-
191 pendence. The east of Crete anchorage -- which was within surface-
192 to-surface missile range of the Independence -- was also occupied
193 (compare Figs. 5 and 6).

194 The contingent operating in the far Western Mediterranean was
195 augmented by the arrival of the submarine relief group and its escort-
196 ing units coming from the Northern Fleet. This meant that both
197 major "choke-points" -- the Straits of Gibraltar and Straits of
198 Sicily -- were covered.

199 Although it had moved out into the western basin of the Medi-
200 terranean on the 10th, the FDR still had not been placed under sur-
201 veillance by a surface combatant tattletale at the end of the per-
202 iod. The Soviets seem to have expected the FDR to move into the
203 eastern basin, however, because potential tattletales appear to
204 have taken up positions southeast of the Straits of Sicily and south
205 of the Straits of Messina -- one of which the FDR would have had to
206 transit to reach the Eastern Mediterranean.

207 The amphibious lift ships did not return to Port Said. On the
208 other hand, the support force, composed of rescue, repair, storage
209 and replenishment ships remained in Alexandria throughout the War.

210 Further east, the AGI apparently returned to its station off
211 the coast of Israel, units of the Squadron began to collect off the
212 Syrian coast, and the initial augmentees from the Black Sea Fleet
213 (a cruiser and two destroyers) arrived in the Mediterranean.⁶⁵

214 13 - 18 October

215 The third significant change in the disposition and activity
216 of the Squadron occurred between the 13th and 18th. For what was
217 probably the first time since World War II, the Soviet Navy moved
218 combat forces into an active war zone. On the 6th, both Egypt and
219 Syria had declared substantial areas off their coasts dangerous to
220 foreign shipping.*⁶⁶ Sixth Fleet ships never entered this zone;

221 _____
222 *
223 Syria's was located north of 33° North and East of 34° East; Egypt's
224 was south of 33° North and East of 29.5° East.

225 units of the Soviet Mediterranean Squadron did (see Fig. 8). After
226 the 12th, a significant concentration of Soviet units -- including
227 surface combatants -- formed between the eastern tip of Cyprus and
228 the Syrian coast. At no time during the War were the Israelis re-
229 ported to have taken direct action against Soviet ships or aircraft
230 enroute either Syria or Egypt. However, on the 10th they began
231 bombing Syrian airfields, destroying several Soviet transport air-
232 craft in the process and causing others to turn back; and on the
233 12th they sank a Soviet cargo ship while attacking Syrian warships
234 in the port of Tartus.⁶⁷ This concentration between Cyprus and
235 Syria appeared immediately thereafter. The Soviets probably moved
236 their forces into the war zone to provide direct support to their
237 air and sea lines of communication to Syria. There have been no
238 indications that these units actually engaged in combat; but they
239 certainly must have been ready to do so if attacked.⁶⁸

240 Additional Soviet amphibious lift ships began to deploy from
241 the Black Sea during this period. Two units exited the Turkish
242 Straits on the 14th; four units transited on the 17th (see Fig. 19).
243 They went directly to Syria. In the light of subsequent develop-
244 ments, this often has been interpreted as the deployment of an am-
245 phibious landing force to be employed if direct Soviet intervention
246 proved necessary. That is possible, but unlikely. The maximum num-
247 ber of Soviet amphibious lift ships present at any one time in the
248 Mediterranean was nine -- four LSTs and five LSMs -- with a collec-

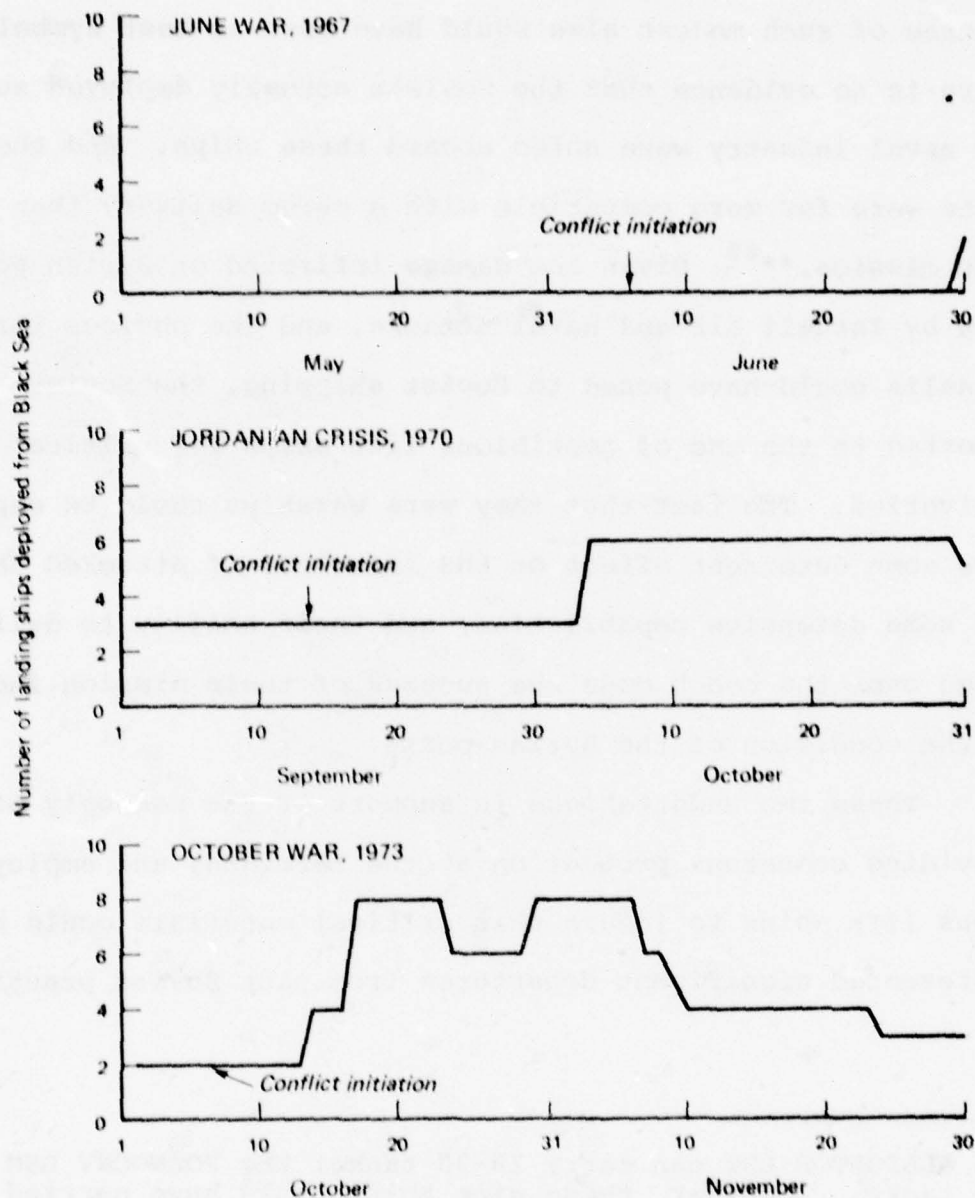


FIG. 19: NUMBER OF AMPHIBIOUS LIFT SHIPS DEPLOYED FROM THE BLACK SEA DURING INTERNATIONAL CRISES *

*Data from: Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Rapport Annuel sur le Mouvement des Navires a travers les Detroits Turcs*, (1968, 1971, 1974 editions).

249 tive capability of carrying about one brigade.* Intervention with
250 a force of such modest size would have been at best symbolic. But
251 there is no evidence that the Soviets actually deployed such a force.
252 Few naval infantry were noted aboard these ships. And their move-
253 ments were far more compatible with a cargo delivery than a troop
254 lift mission.**⁶⁹ Given the damage inflicted on Syrian port facili-
255 ties by Israeli air and naval attacks, and the obvious threat the
256 Israelis could have posed to Soviet shipping, the Soviets probably
257 resorted to the use of amphibious lift ships for critical materiel
258 deliveries. The fact that they were warships could be expected to
259 have some deterrent effect on the Israelis; if attacked they at least
260 had some defensive capabilities; and their ability to deliver their
261 cargo over the beach made the success of their mission independent
262 of the condition of the Syrian ports.

263 These two undertakings in support of the resupply of Syria --
264 providing combatant protection at the terminus, and employing amphi-
265 bious lift ships to insure that critical materials could be unloaded --
266 represented significant departures from past Soviet practice. Prior

267

268 *

269 The ALLIGATOR LST can carry 28-30 tanks; the POLNOCHNY LSM can carry
270 six tanks. Together, these nine ships could have carried approxi-
271 mately 2,000 men.⁷⁰

272

272 **

273 For example, the first two LSTs that deployed after the initiation
274 of the War transited to Syria, returned to the Black Sea, and deployed
275 a second time -- after the War was over.⁷¹ Their return to the Black
276 Sea on the 23rd coincided with Soviet preparations to intervene in
277 Egypt; but that was happenstance. Their transit through the Turkish
278 Straits could not have been declared later than the 16th, well before
279 the necessity for Soviet intervention in Egypt arose.

280 to this, Soviet naval forces had rarely been employed for positive
281 ends -- to accomplish something.* Most of their activity had been
282 oriented toward the negative objectives of deterrence and defense --
283 insuring that things didn't occur.⁷²

284 Two other noteworthy developments occurred during this period.
285 Surveillance of FDR was initiated when it moved into the Central
286 Mediterranean (compare Figs. 7 and 8); and, as if to demonstrate that
287 nothing was amiss, a cruiser and destroyer that had deployed from
288 the Black Sea on the 10th began port visits to Italy.

289 19 - 24 October

290 For most of the period immediately before the U.S. worldwide
291 alert was declared early on the 25th, the Squadron's disposition and
292 activities remained essentially unchanged. Coverage of the "choke
293 points" was maintained; surveillance of the FDR continued; and the
294 bulk of the force remained concentrated in two areas: around Crete --
295 in the Kithira and east of Crete anchorages, off Souda Bay where the
296 Sixth Fleet's amphibious force was located, and in the vicinity of
297 the Independence task group -- and along the lines of communication
298 to Syria (see Fig. 10).

299 No fundamental changes had been made in the Sixth Fleet's pos-
300 ture since it dispersed across the Mediterranean on the 15th to
301 support the U.S. airlift; and none were made until the 25th, when the

302 _____
303 *
304 Transporting the Moroccans was another such exceptional action.

305 Fleet began to concentrate south of Crete in consonance with the alert.
306 That concentration represented a significant change in its posture.

307 Equally significant changes occurred in the disposition and
308 activities of Soviet forces as they responded to those Sixth Fleet
309 movements (compare Figs. 10 and 12, and Figs. 11 and 12). It is
310 noteworthy, however, that the Soviets began their "responsive"
311 movements before the U.S. alert was declared, and hence before the
312 Sixth Fleet began to move.⁷³ The Soviets apparently anticipated
313 strong U.S. opposition to what they felt they might have to do --
314 intervene directly in the conflict to protect Egypt -- and they
315 moved as quickly as possible to be in an advantageous position to
316 deal with that opposition.

317 25 - 30 October

318 Many of the Squadron's movements and activities in the period
319 immediately following the declaration of the U.S. alert were obvious-
320 ly genuine "responses" to the reinforcement and concentration of the
321 Sixth Fleet. Some, however, were not.

322 As the Sixth Fleet carriers -- now three in number -- and the
323 amphibious group -- now reinforced by a second helicopter carrier --
324 all began to converge on the holding area south of Crete, the bulk
325 of the Squadron's combatants formed into Surface Action Groups* and

326

327 *

328 The specific composition of these tactical formations varies with the
329 forces available when and where they are put together. They generally
330 consist of three (or sometimes four) units, at least one of which is
331 surface-to-air missile (SAM)-equipped, and another of which is equip-
332 ped with antiship missiles (SSM). The latter can be either surface
333 combatants or submarines. The SAM ships give these groups some defen-
334 sive capability; the SSM platforms provide their offensive firepower.
335 One unit trails the potential target to provide locating information
336 to the SSM platforms.⁷⁵

337 moved into the same area -- one Group being assigned to each of the
338 carriers, a fourth taking responsibility for the amphibious group
339 (compare Figs. 9, 10, 11 and 12). By the 26th, Soviet forces were
340 in position and ready to attack the carriers. They maintained that
341 readiness for the next week.⁷⁴

342 Some of the forces that participated in this anticarrier oper-
343 ation were already operating south of Crete. Others moved out of
344 the east of Crete and Kithira anchorages -- emptying the latter com-
345 pletely. Still others were drawn from the concentration off Syria.

346 Most of the combatants that had been operating off the Syrian
347 coast, however, moved to a new operating area north of the Nile Delta
348 (see Fig. 12). The objective of this movement remains obscure.
349 Since they congregated in an area located between the Sixth Fleet
350 and Egypt, their presence there had been interpreted variously as
351 an intervention or as an interposition -- intended to deter U.S.
352 intervention. Either is possible, but neither is likely. Those
353 forces could project little power ashore, and thus could do little
354 to affect the situation where it counted: on the West bank of the
355 Suez Canal. And the real deterrent was posed by the Surface Action
356 Groups deployed around the Sixth Fleet's carriers south of Crete.
357 It is more likely that, once the Soviet airlift to Syria had been
358 halted on the 23rd, these units were moved toward Egypt to provide
359 the same sort of support for Soviet lines of communication to Egypt
360 that they had been providing off Syria. Such support would have
361 been necessary had the Soviets actually moved to intervene in Egypt.

362 Whatever the reason for their assembly, those forces did not remain
363 together for long. They had dispersed by the end of the period
364 (compare Figs. 12 and 14).

365 These two concentrations -- around the Sixth Fleet and off
366 the Nile Delta -- were the most visible steps taken by the Soviets
367 during this period. However, they were not the only significant
368 actions taken. The Soviets were also reported to have moved nuclear
369 materials from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean -- presumably to
370 Egypt. These were widely assumed to have been warheads for the
371 SCUD missiles they had made available to the Egyptians earlier.⁷⁶
372 Alternatively, and perhaps more likely, they could have been nuclear
373 warheads for the Mediterranean Squadron's own weapons -- replacements
374 for the conventional warheads with which units had originally deployed,
375 or reloads for those units surviving an initial exchange.

376 As noted earlier, the Soviets also reinforced the Squadron
377 substantially in the period immediately after the alert, effecting
378 a net addition of 16 units -- 7 submarines, 8 surface combatants,
379 and 1 auxiliary -- between the 24th and 31st.⁷⁷

380 31 October - 05 November

381 The Squadron's movements and activities continued to parallel
382 those of the Sixth Fleet as the atmosphere of crisis began to dissi-
383 pate. As the United States relaxed, the Soviets relaxed; but the
384 United States did not relax completely, and neither did the Soviets.

385 The combatant concentration around the Sixth Fleet carrier
386 force was maintained. It was also shifted westward as the carriers

387 moved west (compare Figs. 11, 12, 13 and 14). However, when the
388 signal of relaxation given by the carriers' movement away from
389 the scene of conflict was strengthened by the Independence return-
390 ing to Athens, the Squadron's posture also relaxed: combatants
391 began to move back into anchorages, a port visit was begun in Yugo-
392 slavia, and a few units started to return to the Black Sea (compare
393 Figs. 12 and 14). Most important, the anticarrier operation that
394 had been initiated in the wake of the alert was terminated.⁷⁸

395 Augmentation of the Squadron's combatant strength also ceased.
396 Four units -- including two NANUCHKA-class large guided missile
397 patrol boats -- exited the Turkish Straits on the 31st. These were
398 the last combatants to join the Squadron from the Black Sea until
399 mid-November.⁷⁹

400 In Retrospect

401 Two aspects of the Squadron's behavior during the War deserve
402 added emphasis: its responsiveness to U.S. movements and activities,
403 and the employment of Soviet naval forces for positive ends in a
404 high-risk situation, as opposed to merely being present in the area.
405 Positive use was new. Responsiveness had long been standard operating
406 procedure for the Squadron -- with one important exception.

407 The exception concerns the assignment of a Surface Action
408 Group to the Sixth Fleet's amphibious force. In previous crises --
409 including the 1970 Jordanian Civil War, in which there was a real
410 threat of U.S. intervention -- Soviet attention (and firepower) had
411 been focused on the Sixth Fleet's carriers; its amphibious force had

412 been largely ignored. Thus the question of Soviet objectives in
413 deploying countering forces had gone unanswered: did the Soviets
414 target the carriers because of their potential for launching ~~stra-~~
415 tegic nuclear strikes against the Soviet Union itself, or because
416 of their potential for projecting conventional power into whatever
417 local conflicts had brought them to the littoral? In the October
418 War, the amphibious force -- with no capability to strike the Soviet
419 Union -- received exactly the same treatment as the carriers. One
420 question was therefore answered: at the minimum, the Soviets were,
421 in fact, concerned about the potential for U.S. intervention in the
422 conflict ashore. Whether they were concerned about more than that --
423 i.e., about the carriers' residual strategic strike capabilities --
424 was not clarified.

425 Until the October War, the standard operating procedure for
426 the Squadron on the outbreak of open conflict on the littoral was
427 to move away from the combat zone, and -- except as necessary to
428 monitor events ashore and to stay within attack range of the Sixth
429 Fleet's carriers -- to remain outside that zone until the conflict
430 had subsided. During the October War, however, this policy was
431 cast aside. Squadron units not only operated in strength and for
432 an extended period inside the combat zone, but they were performing
433 what can only be termed combatant functions while they were located
434 there.

435 This was not the first time the Soviets had accepted the poten-
436 tiality of conflict in providing support to their Arab clients. They

437 deliberately exposed a number of naval units in 1967 to deter Israeli
438 attacks on Port Said;⁸⁰ and in 1970, in order to deter Israeli air-
439 strikes deep inside Egyptian territory, they deployed a massive air
440 defense system to Egypt, parts of which they themselves manned.⁸¹
441 Neither of these actions involved the performance of any positive
442 function, however. Moreover, in both cases it was reasonable for
443 the Soviets to expect that the deterrent would work -- i.e., that
444 the Israelis would not attack their forces in Egypt.

445 During the October War, on the other hand, while it turned
446 out that the Soviets could count on the Israelis not to attack their
447 transports moving in international sea and air space, the same did
448 not apply once those transports reached Syrian territory: the
449 Soviets had to deploy forces to defend the terminus of their re-
450 supply effort.⁸² They showed themselves willing to do that. That
451 represented a major change in their modus operandi.

001 VIII: INSIGHTS

002 In many respects, the outcome of the October War was no less
003 ambiguous than the situation out of which the War itself emerged.
004 There was no clear winner.

005 Had the War been halted shortly after it began, there might
006 have been obvious victors: Egypt, Syria, and by extension the Soviet
007 Union. But it continued well past that point, and when it finally
008 stopped only the apparent losers stood out: Syria was losing on
009 the battlefield; Egypt was well on the way to doing the same; Israel
010 was winning militarily but losing politically; and the Soviet Union
011 had been shut out in the cold on both counts.

012 Before the War, few would have predicted that such a conflict
013 would have such an outcome. Given the military situation that pre-
014 vailed at the end of the first day of fighting, even fewer would
015 have predicted that the Soviets would wind up among the losers.
016 Tracing the course of events from beginning to end, however, makes
017 it clear that, as far as the Soviets were concerned, the outcome
018 was in a sense foreordained. It was the product of four "givens":

- 019 1. Each superpower had an overriding interest in
020 avoiding conflict with the other.
- 021 2. Both had an only slightly less vital interest
022 in preventing the collapse of the nations they
023 were backing.
- 024 3. Local military superiority continues to be
025 important in deciding contested outcomes.
- 026 4. The Soviets were unable to project a signifi-
027 cant quantum of usable military power into the
028 Middle East.
- 029

030 Each of these points deserves some elucidation.

031 At the outbreak of the War, both superpowers had incentives
032 to downplay the nature and extent of actual Soviet involvement in
033 its preparation and prosecution. Both acted accordingly. The
034 Soviets were anxious to downplay their role in order not to jeo-
035 pardize hard-won improvements in their relations with the United
036 States. The United States was no less anxious to preserve those
037 relations; and therefore it too was willing to downplay the Soviet
038 role -- in order to avoid being forced to respond to things to which
039 it did not want to respond, and to take actions it did not wish to take.

040 In both cases, an action that directly threatened detente was clearly
041 only the first step onto a potentially slippery slope, near the
042 bottom of which stood direct threats to the other superpower' (or
043 worse).

044 As the War went on, and their clients' military fortunes began
045 to change, the Soviets' incentives and actions also began to change.
046 First, it became important that the Arabs realize that the Soviets
047 were supporting them actively. Then it became important that Israel
048 realize this as well. Finally, it became important that the United
049 States receive the same message. The establishment of Soviet air-
050 and sea lifts conveyed the first of these messages. The movement of
051 Soviet naval forces into the combat zone to protect those lift opera-
052 tions, the direct threats made against Israel and, ultimately, the
053 launching of SCUDS -- which in the Middle East could only be regarded
054 as strategic strike weapons -- conveyed the second message. The
055 alerting and apparent marshalling of Soviet projection forces, coupled
056 with explicit statements of their intent to intervene, guaranteed
057 that the United States received the third of these messages.

058 The United States did not wholly approve of the Soviets' eff-
059 orts to end the conflict on terms favoring their own clients; and
060 U.S. incentives and actions began to change also -- but these changes
061 were more closely linked with what the Soviets were doing than with
062 the changes taking place in the military fortunes of Israel. It be-
063 came important to the United States that the Soviets understand two
064 things: that there were limits to the impact they would be permitted

065 to exercise on the conflict, and where those limits lay. The United
066 States would not permit the Soviets to determine the outcome of the
067 conflict either indirectly, through their resupply efforts, or di-
068 rectly, by deploying their ground forces into the combat arena. The
069 initiation of U.S. air- and sea lift operations conveyed the first
070 of those messages to the Soviets. The worldwide U.S. military alert
071 called Soviet attention to the actions that transmitted the second
072 of those messages. When it called its alert, the United States also
073 insured that it, rather than the Soviets, had the superior military
074 capability in the critical place at the critical time: it reinforced
075 the Sixth Fleet and concentrated it athwart the Soviet's air and sea
076 lines of communication to the Middle East, making Soviet intervention
077 in the conflict, at best, potentially very costly, and at worst,
078 militarily infeasible. The Soviets got that message.

079 This may or may not have been the message the United States
080 intended to send. The reinforcement and concentration of the Sixth
081 Fleet may have been ordered only as a precaution, or undertaken for
082 some specific purpose that did not include influencing Soviet be-
083 havior. Regardless of their antecedent(s) -- which the Soviets
084 could not have known with certainty -- those steps contained a
085 message no prudent Soviet decision-maker could ignore.

086 At the very minimum, an outcome like that argues the case for
087 a better understanding of this unique form of non-verbal communica-
088 tion. It is obviously in the United States' interest to insure that,
089 both routinely and in crises, its actions accurately reflect its in-

090 tentions, although there may be occasions in the future on which
091 it wants to achieve precisely the opposite effect. On both counts
092 then, prudence dictates that efforts be devoted to acquiring some
093 fluency in this mode of discourse.

SOURCES

- 125 1. President Sadat discussed many of these events in a series of
126 interviews with Arnaud De Borchgrave, Senior Editor of Newsweek,
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